

Jean Craighead George

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Meet the Author
Series

By Alice Cary

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The Learning Works Meet the Author Series

Jean Craighead George

by Alice Cary

The Learning Works, Inc.
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For Mom, Dad, Jim, and Will, with love.

Many thanks to Jean George, Janet Walsh,

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Photo credit: Karen Haynam

Jean Craighead George in 1991, Mohonk Reservation, New York

Preface

One sunny afternoon a boy and his parents walked along an Oregon beach where giant trees had washed ashore, littering the sand like dinosaur bones. They were alone except for a woman walking toward them. She had blond, curly hair and observant eyes that seemed to soak in every detail.

"What brings you here?" she asked.

"You'd be surprised," the father said, smiling. "We're looking for a tree big enough for a boy to live in."

A strange look crossed the woman's face. "Have you read *My Side of the Mountain*?" she asked.

"Exactly!" the mother said. "We read it and my son wanted to see a tree like Sam Gribley's. He didn't think they grew so big."

"Did you find one?" the woman asked.

The father nodded. "Now my son's got all the proof he needs."

Suddenly the boy spoke. "How do *you* know that book?"

The woman rubbed her toe in the sand, as if deciding whether to answer. Finally she smiled. "I wrote it."

"No you didn't!" the boy said, his face filled with anger. As he walked away, he glared back and said, "A boy 13 years old wrote that book. His name is Sam Gribley."

Jean Craighead George *did* write *My Side of the Mountain*, *Julie of the Wolves*, and dozens more wonderful books. She writes so well that characters like Sam Gribley and Julie Kapugen seem real to many readers.

How does she make them so believable? Because she writes from experience and shares much in common with Sam and Julie. Like Sam, she has always felt at home in trees, she has lived with falcons, and she knows how to find food and shelter in the wild. Like Julie, she has explored the Arctic tundra and knelt on her hands and knees to learn the language of wolves.

This book is the story of how the spirits of Sam and Julie were born in Jean Craighead George, and how she came to share their lives and others with the rest of the world.

Chapter 1

Runaway

"There is no real Sam, except inside me." His adventures are the fulfillment of that day long ago when I told my mother I was going to run away. . . .

preface to My Side of the Mountain

"I'm going to run away," four-year-old Jean Carolyn Craighead announced one morning in 1923.

"Any particular reason?" her mother said. She was washing the breakfast dishes and didn't turn around.

The curly-haired girl frowned. "I'm tired of making my bed. I just mess it up again every night."

"I see," said her mother, still washing. "Then you'll need to pack."

Jean stared at her mother. Finally, she nodded, went to her room and pulled a small suitcase from the closet. She put it on her rumpled bed. Looking around, she spotted her nightgown on top of her pillow. After doing her best to fold it neatly, she shoved it inside the suitcase.

Now what?

"Don't forget your toothbrush," her mother called from the kitchen.

Jean retrieved it from the bathroom, then sat on her bed a few seconds, looking around one last time. She knew where she wanted to go—her grandmother's house in Virginia. She missed Grandmother Johnson, and Jean was sure they'd do fun things together, certainly not chores.

She would, however, miss her mother and father as well as Frank and John, her twin brothers. The twins were three years older than Jean and were now in school. How surprised they would be to find her gone! Jean closed her suitcase.

"I'm ready!"

Her mother met her at the front door. "So soon?" she said.

When Jean nodded, her mother leaned down and gave her a kiss.

"Be careful," she said. "And have a good trip."

Jean hugged Mrs. Craighead, then, suitcase in hand, marched down the sidewalk. Feeling grown-up and determined, she didn't look back, but listened to the door

close behind her. She stopped under an oak tree in a neighbor's yard. She needed some time to plan out her journey.

Virginia was far, far away. In fact, it was in another country. The Craigheads' real home was in Washington, D.C., but now they were temporarily living in Ottawa, Canada. Dr. Frank C. Craighead was a scientist who studied bugs, an entomologist. The Canadian government had hired him to find a way to stop bark beetles from killing trees.

Jean wasn't sure how to get all the way to Virginia, but maybe the trolley driver could help. She didn't have any money, but that didn't stop her—she hurried down the hill to the trolley stop. She sat on the curb, wondering whether her mother missed her yet. What time was it? Frank and John might be home from school by now.

"Jean Craighead!" a man called out. It was one of the neighbors. "What are you doing here? Where's your mother?"

"Home," Jean mumbled.

"You're alone?"

"I'm running away."

The man raised his eyebrows. "Does your mother know?"

Jean nodded.

Taking Jean's hand, the man picked up her suitcase and said, "Let's just make sure." As they walked up the hill, Jean's mother came toward them. She must have been watching the whole time!

Feeling somehow betrayed, Jean stomped inside the

house and into her room. Suddenly all her determination crumbled. She threw herself on top of her bed. Deep inside, however, she felt relieved to be home.

A few minutes later her mother came in and sat down beside her, squeezing her shoulders and rubbing her back.

"I'm glad you're home," her mother said.

Jean didn't look up.

"You know," her mother said, "I did the same thing when I was your age."

"What do you mean?"

"I ran away. My mother packed my suitcase. But I didn't get far. Not as far as you."

Jean sat up. "Grandmother Johnson packed for you?"

"She did."

Jean smiled as her mother left the room. Running away had been exciting—more exciting than bed-making any day.

As Jean got older, she frequently fantasized about running away, even after she was an adult. But instead of going to Grandmother Johnson's house, her goal was to make a home for herself in the Maryland woods, along the Potomac River.

In the preface to *My Side of the Mountain*, Jean explained her dream: "As I envisioned it, I would live by a waterfall in the woods and catch fish on hooks made from the forks of tree limbs, as I had been taught by my father. I would walk among the wildflowers and trees, listen to

the birds, read the weather report in the clouds and wind,
and stride down mountainsides independent and free."

What made Jean so adventurous?

Chapter 2

Up the River

"My father took us outdoors every weekend. We walked along the Potomac River bottom land learning all the plants and animals. He taught my brothers and me which ones were edible, how to make stews from the clams, and how to make fishhooks and lean-tos. It was just a wonderful childhood."

Jean Craighead George
interview in Chappaqua, NY (January 1996)

"Let's go up the river!"

The words rang throughout the Craighead home like a fire alarm, spurring everyone to action. Dr. Craighead was ready to go. Six-year-old Jean sat drawing on her bed. It was 1925 and the family was back home in Washington,

D.C. Dr. Craighead was working for the United States Forest Service.

Jean listened to Frank and John charge down the steps. Together, as always, they sounded like one boy with four legs.

"Jean!" her father called.

"Coming!"

On this hot September day Jean had already put on her bathing suit, hoping her father might take them upriver. Almost every weekend they went to their favorite spot, Cupid's Bower, just over the Maryland border, full of fine places to swim, hike, and picnic. Jean wasn't sure where the name came from, but Cupid had struck her parents with his love arrow on this river, the Potomac. Her mother loved to tell how her father had courted her there. They had met when Jean's mother was working as an entomological apprentice at the Smithsonian Institution. Frank Craighead would canoe to Alexandria, Virginia, where her mother grew up, to deliver baskets of wildflowers—Virginia bluebells, dogtooth violets, and dutchman's breeches.

"Jean! Where are you?"

Wildflower bouquets were definitely *not* on her father's mind right now.

Jean ran downstairs and out the front door. Everyone was waiting in the Chevy. She squeezed into the back seat next to the picnic basket. During the ride she inhaled happily, wondering what treats her mother had packed that day.

As soon as the car stopped, Frank and John raced off.

Jean adored her brothers. They were handsome, smart, funny, kind—everything a girl could want in a brother (or any boy, for that matter).

Remarkable as they were, though, she couldn't help feeling left out. She was younger, she was a girl, and she wasn't their twin.

They always have someone to play with, Jean thought. I've just got me.

As Jean tagged along behind her parents, a tree stump caught her eye. An opening on one side looked just like a little door. The inside was hollow. Jean grinned. This little house was bare, but cozy. She pulled up some moss and crawled inside. *Much better*, she thought, pressing the moss into a corner. *The green rug makes it feel homey*. Jean stared at the moss spores as though studying a painting in a museum, trying to memorize every detail so she could draw them later. Then she thought of other things her new house needed: tiny acorn cups, for instance, and pine needle brooms.

I could be comfortable here for a long, long time, she thought. A tree is a fine place to live.

"Jean! Where are you?" Her father was calling.

Jean peered out like a squirrel from its nest.

Up ahead, Dr. Craighead crouched on his hands and knees. He had found something.

"Watch," he said when Jean knelt beside him. In his hand was a beetle. He set it down on its back. The beetle's legs wiggled like the arms and legs of a baby.

Woosh! The beetle flew up six inches, then down, landing on its feet.

Jean squealed in surprise.

Her father grinned. "Quite an acrobat, isn't he?"

"How did he do that?"

"He's an elater beetle," her father said. He picked up the insect, exposing its underside. "He can somersault because he can arch his back at a joint between his thorax and abdomen. When he snaps it back in place—zoom, up he goes."

Jean took the beetle from him and put it on its back. It flipped again, this time even higher.

"I wish I could do that!" she said.

Her father smiled slyly.

Jean knew the smile meant he had spotted something else, and she was supposed to find it. But nothing looked unusual.

After a moment or two, her father said, "That sassafras certainly smells sweet."

A sapling grew just to her right. Jean scoured every inch of its stem and leaves. Nice, but ordinary.

"Dad," she finally said. "There's nothing there. Not even an ant."

"Oh, really?" He touched a twig on one of the slim branches. It began to move.

"It's walking!" Jean cried. "The stick is walking!"

He nodded. "Exactly. It's actually an insect, but its legs are practically invisible."

"What's it called?"

"Just what you said. A walking stick."

"Lunch time!" Mrs. Craighead's call was the second alarm of the day, summoning everyone from various

directions. Jean's mother was a great cook—the best chicken fryer in the South, her family believed—and no one wanted to miss a minute of one of her meals. Frank and John appeared from farther up the river, dripping wet.

"Dry off, boys," their mother said, handing them a towel.

"The falls are great today," John said. "Jean, what have you been doing?"

"Dad showed me some things," Jean said. She didn't mention her stump house. She wanted it to be her own secret place.

"Can we have fried rattlesnake?" Frank said.

"Or eel?" John said.

"Another time," Dr. Craighead said. "Your mother brought everything we need." He picked up his knapsack and said, "Except for one thing. Boys, you come with me."

Jean stayed behind to help her mother unpack the picnic basket. When the weather was cool, the Craigheads feasted on hot food—vegetable soup or garlic-filled lamb chops. But this humid, late-summer day called for something cool.

"Today's colors are green and orange," Mrs. Craighead announced, unwrapping a stack of broccoli and carrot sandwiches. "And there's leftover fried chicken, too."

Jean poured cups of ice tea and fresh-squeezed orange juice. Before long, Dr. Craighead and the twins returned.

"What did you find?" Jean asked.

"Dandelion greens," her father said.

He always added something wild to the menu, things

like lily bulbs, sumac tea, or wintergreen. In fact, her mother claimed that it wasn't the wildflower bouquets that had convinced her to marry him, but the frog legs he dropped at her feet, all cleaned and ready to be cooked!

After lunch, Jean took one of her mother's sticky buns and climbed on top of a boulder at the river's edge. These rocks were her own fortress, the perfect place to listen to the Potomac and watch the trees that lined the riverbank like castle walls. There was always something to see: a hawk soaring overhead or a perch darting below the water, its silver scales reflecting the sunlight like a mirror.

Dessert finished, Jean leaned down and rinsed her sticky hands in the cool, flowing water. She stood up and leaped from boulder to boulder—dancing to her own music—never missing a step.

There was no place on earth she'd rather be.

Chapter 3

Arrivals and Departures

Today Ellen and I played a game. We pretended that we were captured by great kings in tall towers. These towers were trees. When we got cold we went into the house and danced and danced. I didn't do anything else but dance. . . .

Jean Craighead's diary
January 3, 1931

As the Craigheads settled into life in Washington, D.C., Jean found many new friends. First there were her cousins Paula and Ellen, then Nod moved in, and, finally, along came June Flood, the next best thing to having a twin.

Jean and her family lived at 5301 41st Street, N.W. At that time their Washington, D.C., neighborhood didn't feel like a city. Through the windows in her second-floor bedroom, Jean could see row houses across the street, and behind them, beautiful fields perfect for exploring, running, and flying kites.

This wasn't the only attraction. Around the corner and a block away lived the Zirpels. Aunt Polly Zirpel was Jean's mother's sister, a warm woman who made Jean feel right at home—as did her daughters, Ellen and Paula. Ellen had reddish hair and a ready laugh. Paula loved to paint and draw, so right from the start she and Jean spent hours hunched over their artwork. Later, cousins Irving and Charlotte were born.

Jean was in the middle of the two older sisters: Ellen was a year older, Paula, a year younger. Soon the girls were together almost all the time, pretending, ice skating, reading—anything they could think of. They made marionettes and staged performances of Tom Sawyer and Robin Hood at neighborhood birthday parties. They kept diaries and told each other their deepest secrets. Often Ellen and Paula accompanied Jean and her family on outings to Cupid's Bower.

The cousins also learned to dance. Mrs. Craighead and Aunt Polly enrolled the girls in the Carolyn McKinley School of Interpretive Dance. There they learned the style of Isadora Duncan—a pioneer of modern dance who died in a freak car accident in 1927, when her scarf became tangled in the wheel of a car and strangled her.

Like the great Duncan, Jean, Ellen, and Paula danced

barefoot and tie-dyed their own costumes, which always included long, flowing scarves. After class, they came home to the Zirpels' big lawn and invented their own dances, "interpreting" music by Schubert, Ravel, and Debussy, which came from records played on a wind-up Victrola.

Aunt Polly and Jean's mother had a motto: "Be different. Never follow the crowd." Ellen and Paula lived by their creed, and Jean did too.

When Jean wasn't with Ellen and Paula, Mrs. Craighead kept her busy. On Saturdays Jean's job was to bake a cake for the family. During summer vacation she was expected to embroider and crochet Christmas presents for her grandmother, her aunts, and other relatives. Usually Jean liked these projects, but she sometimes grew restless for more lively diversions. She never had to wait long, though, because something interesting was always going on in the Craighead household.

One day when Jean was about six, her father brought home a very special present.

"Jean," he called, "Where are you?"

Jean met her father at the front door. He cradled something she couldn't quite see.

"For you," he said, placing a fuzzy white ball in her hands.

Jean found herself face to face with large, dark eyes staring out from a small black head on top of a body covered with white feathers.

"What is it?"

"It's a turkey vulture," Dr. Craighead said. "About a week old. A fisherman shot his parents for eating his catch of fish."

"He's mine?" Jean felt sorry for the little thing, but was thrilled to have a pet. In fact, she felt like jumping, but didn't want to disturb him. She held him in her lap until supper time, then said, "Dad, what does he eat?"

"Vultures eat carrion, Jean."

"What's that?"

"It's a polite way of saying dead things."

"That's disgusting."

"No, it's not," Dr. Craighead said. "All living things are works of art. Each one has a job to do, and vultures are in charge of cleaning up. That's why they eat dead things."

Jean still wasn't sure what to feed her bird, but Dr. Craighead disappeared into the kitchen and soon returned with chicken meat. The bird, quiet until now, ate with surprising enthusiasm.

Before the night was over, he had a home and a name. Home was a newspaper-lined box under the kitchen table. Jean decided to call him Nod because he held his head down.

"Nod," she whispered, before going to bed. "You look so sad. Is it because you're in charge of dead things?"

Nod simply blinked, looking more mournful than ever.

Nod grew and grew.

After several weeks his white feathers turned black, looking almost like an undertaker's coat. His favorite place was the kitchen, on top of the door. He couldn't fly yet, so Jean used a stool to lift him to his perch.

One day, when Mrs. Craighead was frying chicken, Nod began to squawk, which meant he was hungry. As Jean lifted him down and put him in his box to feed him, she noticed her mother frowning.

"What's wrong?"

"It's that bird," she said. "All he does is watch me cook. Every night I feel as though he's going to snatch our supper."

"Nod's just doing his job, Mother," Jean said. She looked out the window and saw Mrs. Brown, their next-door neighbor, cooking in her kitchen. Mrs. Brown liked Jean because Jean always waved at her or said hello when she played outside, but she often complained about Frank and John and the noise they made. *What would she think, Jean wondered, if she knew I had a vulture under the table?*

Two weeks later, Jean stood in the backyard watching Nod hop over the grass. From time to time he spread his wings and flapped. He was huge now, nearly six feet long from wing tip to wing tip. He was a wonderful pet—quite sweet—and Jean was proud of him. But she was worried, too.

That evening she interrupted her father as he read in the living room. "Dad," she said, "shouldn't Nod be flying by now?"

"Not yet. Even if he were ready, he wouldn't fly here."

"Why not?"

"Young vultures need help from the sun. The warming earth creates updrafts, sort of like an elevator. Someday Nod will take a ride on an updraft, lift his wings, and soar."

"I can't wait," Jean said. "I'm going to take him outside every day to practice."

Dad shook his head. "It won't do any good. There aren't any updrafts in the yard, either."

Just then Mother joined them.

"I heard you talking about Nod," she said. "Something *must* be done. He's just too big for our kitchen. I simply can't have him watching over everything I cook."

And so it was decided that Nod needed a new home. Jean was heartbroken, but there was no other solution. One evening Dr. Craighead came home and announced that Nod would be going to Scotland.

"Scotland?" Jean said.

"I spoke with Dr. Mann today," her father said.

Jean looked puzzled.

"He's the director of the Washington National Zoo. He told me that a zoo in Scotland is looking for turkey vultures. Nod will have a nice new home."

Jean's lips quivered.

"Jean," Dr. Craighead said, putting his arm around her. "We're lucky to have been with Nod this long. He's remarkable. He can find dead things when no one else

can find them. He has senses we can't understand. Isn't that right?"

Jean nodded.

"That's the way it goes with wild things. Even if they're with us for just a brief time, we're lucky to have a chance to learn about them. And even though Nod has to leave, you'll always remember him."

A few days later Jean and her father took Nod to Dr. Mann, who would oversee his trip across the Atlantic. Jean gave Nod a sad, loving good-bye.

Of course, her father was right; Jean never forgot him.

About this time someone new entered Jean's life.

Her name was June Flood. She was a beautiful girl Jean's age—seven—with long, blond, corkscrew curls. No matter what the situation, June always knew exactly the right thing to do. Jean liked her so much that she sometimes let June wear her very favorite dress, which her mother had made from black satin and covered with appliqued monarch butterflies.

Why was June so perfect? She was Jean's imaginary friend. Frank and John always had each other; now, whenever Ellen and Paula weren't around, Jean had June. They had lots of fun together. Pretty as she was, June didn't mind climbing through culverts and pipes or shimmying to the top of a tree. Imaginary friends rarely argue.

One day, however, Jean and June didn't see eye to eye. As usual, they were walking to school, about a mile. Ordinarily they walked along the curbs—talking the

entire way—but today huge puddles lined the street.

"We'd better walk on the sidewalk," June told Jean.
"We might fall in."

"Don't worry," Jean said. "We won't."

Jean began walking along the curb, leaving June on the sidewalk. They didn't talk much because Jean had to concentrate on keeping her balance. After a block or two, though, she felt confident.

"Try it, June," Jean urged. "I'm not having any trouble. It's lots of—"

Suddenly Jean's foot slipped.

Splash! One foot followed the other and Jean stood ankle-deep in water, with mud splattered on her dress.

Jean wanted to cry. Mother worked so hard to make her dresses, and she would be furious. Jean just stood there wondering what to do.

"Get out of the puddle," June told her.

Jean stepped onto the sidewalk and stared down at her muddy, soggy self. *At least*, she thought, *June didn't say "I told you so."*

"Go to Aunt Polly's after school," June suggested.
"She'll help you."

The plan was good, and Jean felt better. Her socks stayed squishy for a while, but eventually they dried out. As soon as school ended, she headed straight for Aunt Polly's, this time staying on the sidewalk.

The minute Jean showed Aunt Polly her muddy dress, she sprang into action. With the help of a little soap and water, an iron, and a shoeshine rag, Aunt Polly made Jean's dress and shoes practically good as new.

Jean fell asleep that night thinking how lucky she was to have a friend like June.

Several years later, when Jean was about 11, she was invited to a birthday party. June accompanied her, of course.

At the party Jean saw a girl she didn't know, a girl with corkscrew curls just like her imaginary friend.

"My name's Jean Craighead," Jean said. "What's yours?"

"June Flood," the girl answered.

Jean's mouth dropped open. She couldn't believe that someone besides her special friend was also named June Flood. By now she'd known *her* June for several years and couldn't even remember how she got her name.

Jean stared so long that the real-life June finally asked, "What's wrong?" Finally, she walked away and began talking to some other girls.

Jean spent the rest of the party in a daze, glancing from time to time at the new girl. Jean didn't like her at all. She wasn't one bit like her friend, except for her name and her curls.

From that moment on, however, whenever Jean tried to talk to *her* June, all she saw was the new girl's face. No matter how hard she tried, June Flood just wasn't June Flood anymore, and her imaginary friend disappeared forever.

Nod was gone, now June. Jean needed something else—but what?

Chapter 4

Reaching for the Stars

Last night I had a lovely dream. I dreamed I went to a dead forest. The sun shown its way through the forest and made it gold. I wanted to write a poem about it but couldn't gather my thoughts.

Jean Craighead's diary
January 19, 1931

Birds and bugs weren't the only thing keeping Jean busy; there were plenty of books as well. She adored *Mrs. Wiggins of the Cabbage Patch*, wept over *Bambi*, and cheered for Tom Sawyer, Winnie-the-Pooh, and Hiawatha.

Jean loved hearing her mother read aloud, she loved to read on her own, and she loved to read at school. Sometimes, though, she got carried away with her enthusiasm for books and words.

Mrs. Clark, her third-grade teacher, often sent students to the chalkboard to work on math. One day Jean stood in front of a problem with absolutely no idea how to solve it. Words, not numbers, swirled in her head. Jean knew she had to do *something*; she didn't want to disappoint Mrs. Clark. She thought for a moment or two and wrote a short poem—a new one about nature. Then she returned to her desk.

Mrs. Clark stood in front of the chalkboard and inspected everyone's work. She paused in front of Jean's unsolved problem longer than she stopped anywhere else. Slowly she turned around.

Jean gripped her seat. *Maybe I should have written a number, she thought, even if it was wrong.*

"Jean," Mrs. Clark said. "That's a lovely poem."

Nothing more. Not one word about arithmetic. Mrs. Clark went on to the next problem.

Jean beamed. Numbers were interesting, but words were her favorite. She knew she wanted to be a writer. She was thrilled by the way writing allowed her to escape to a different world, one where she could create mountains and valleys and rivers and fill them with people and animals.

Jean wrote often. She also illustrated her work with drawings and paintings. Jean's bedroom had everything a writer needed: bookcases, a walnut desk, and a walk-in

closet—the perfect place to hide her poems and diaries. She practiced and practiced, but doubted she'd ever be good enough to call herself “a real writer.”

By the time Jean reached sixth grade, she realized that her favorite writers—authors like Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe—had led lives full of suffering and adventure. All these talented people seemed to have lived in attic rooms, in cornfields, or on riverboats. How could she ever amount to anything here in her ordinary room, in her ordinary house, in this ordinary neighborhood, Jean wondered.

After pondering the problem, Jean finally decided that her room had one thing that might help, something almost magical: a window to the front-porch roof. She would write outdoors, at night, on the roof—that was almost as good as a cornfield. She could picture herself finding just the right word as the moonlight fell on her notebook. What a splendid place to write, and, better yet, slightly dangerous.

One night Jean looked out and knew the time was right. She gathered flashlight, pen, and paper, then crawled outside and found a perch beside the chimney. Her father had helped her make a stand so her flashlight wouldn't roll off the slanted roof. She entered an enchanted world out there, with the moon and stars overhead and lights shining from all the surrounding houses. She sat, looked, and waited for the words to come.

They didn't. Before long Jean had seen all there was to see. She was chilly. She hugged herself to keep warm, thinking, “This will make me a better writer. This will

make me a better writer." But every time she moved, the chimney bricks scraped her back. Her notebook was still blank. At this rate, she would never be a writer. For some reason, all she could think of was Nod.

Finally Jean had had enough. She crawled back inside. Maybe when she got older she would have a chance to live in a garret or travel on a riverboat, and *then* be a writer.

She couldn't stop thinking about Nod. She wandered over to his picture sitting on her desk. She sat down, remembering how funny he used to look on top of the kitchen door, how grand he looked when he spread his wings.

Now the words started to come; Jean began to write.

She had learned several important lessons that night, lessons that remained useful for the rest of her life. She discovered that a beautiful place like the moonlit roof could provide inspiration—but sometimes in surprising ways. She learned she wrote best about people, places, and animals deep in her heart, like Nod. And she learned that no matter how pretty a place was, stories and poems didn't instantly appear. Words didn't automatically flow. Writing required more than a good idea; it required work.

For Jean, the best place to do that work was right in her ordinary neighborhood, inside her ordinary house, seated at her ordinary desk. In years to come, she would travel the world and see extraordinary sights—the wolves of Alaska, delicate desert plants, and animals of the rain forest—but she always came home to write.

Chapter 5

Craigheads

June and her twin brothers knew it was the most beautiful house in the world. Whatever its oddities and drawbacks they did not see them. It glowed in their minds, for here they ran barefooted through rooms, up and down stairs and over the meadows and fields until their mother gathered them in September and took them back to the city and the dark months of school.

The Summer of the Falcon

If Cupid's Bower was one of Jean's favorite places in the world, then "Craigheads" was close to heaven.

Every summer, as soon as school was out, the family loaded up the car and headed to the large Victorian house

that shared the family name. Cradled in a mountain valley near Carlisle, Pennsylvania, it had been her father's boyhood home. The land had been in the family since 1742, when it was purchased from the son of the man who founded the state, William Penn. After Jean's grandparents died, their children decided to keep the house instead of selling it, opening its doors every summer as a family vacation spot.

During those months the house was usually full. Jean's family stayed all summer, although Dr. Craighead wasn't always there. For most of the summer, he traveled on business, visiting field research stations across the country.

Uncle Gene, Aunt Myra, and cousins Sam and Bill also spent the entire summer. Aunt Ruth and her daughters, Nancy and Barbara, came for one or two weeks at a time.

With so much togetherness, mealtimes were usually separate occasions. Within the big kitchen, the mother of each family had her own work table, coal oil stove, and icebox. This arrangement, everyone agreed, reduced arguments about whose turn it was to cook and clean up, and who wanted to eat what.

Many chores, though, were shared by the cousins: lawn mowing and yard duty for the boys; dusting, washing dishes, and canning fruits and vegetables for the girls. One day Jean argued that mowing the lawn would be much more fun than scrubbing pots and pans. It was, but she ended up doing both the lawn and the dishes when "the boys" were busy or on excursions with their Uncle Gene.

Once such tasks were done, the young people were free to steal away to Yellow Breeches Creek to fish, swim, canoe, or, perhaps, hop aboard a hay wagon that belonged to a nearby farmer.

And no summer was complete without at least one big adventure in Bear Cave, a bat-filled cavern up the creek. No bears lived there now, so the kids decided that maybe the name was actually "Bare Cave." It was near a bend in the creek, a perfect place for skinny-dipping.

On Saturday and Sunday evenings, Jean and her cousins put on shows for the adults. Jean danced, Sam played the flute, and a neighbor played the autoharp. Jean loved to sing at these events, which often lasted until dark—but her cousins frequently complained she was off-key.

Jean slept in a small bedroom at the back of the house, overlooking the creek. The room had once belonged to her grandfather, and now she claimed it as her own. She often sat in front of the window and wrote poetry. She decorated the walls with her own murals, sending elves sliding down cracks in the wallpaper and making birds emerge from holes in the plaster.

She also added her artistic touch to the kitchen. One summer, when Uncle Gene was preparing the walls for a fresh coat of paint, Jean asked if she could draw a picture. He agreed, so long as she washed a section of the wall first. Soon everyone in the family had gotten in on the act, scrubbing the walls and adding their own drawings. The kitchen never got a new coat of paint; nobody could bear to cover up the family gallery. It is still there.

Jean had other projects as well: gathering, pressing,

and labeling wildflowers, and collecting abandoned bird nests with Bill. She spent lots of time with Sam, who was about a year younger and extremely imaginative. Together they invented their own private language of nouns and verbs, with phrases like "toe squal," "heel squil," and "knee squad," meaning "I am," "you are," and "he is." Not only did they have their own language, they built their own world out of clay on the banks of the creek. What started with a house or two turned into a city, complete with roads and shops.

Meanwhile, Jean's brothers were extremely busy with their own pursuits. After reading a book, *The Art of Falconry*, by Frederick the II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the thirteenth century, they decided to become experts on falconry, the art of training birds of prey, such as hawks, to hunt. They also met a world-renowned falconer named Captain Knight of England. Before long the backyard was spotted with trained hawks, falcons, and owls.

Because only a handful of people in the United States knew how to train falcons, John and Frank's efforts drew lots of attention. An editor at *National Geographic* asked them to write about their experiences and submit their photographs to the magazine. *The Saturday Evening Post* also accepted an article from the twins. Later, in 1939, they would write an entire book about their adventures in falconry, called *Hawks in the Hand*.

One day they presented Jean with her own baby bird, a kestrel, or sparrow hawk—the smallest of all falcons. They had taken him from his nest. Seconds after being

placed in Jean's hands, he sunk his sharp claws into her skin. "Hey!" she yelped. "That hurts. You're a bad boy!"

The name stuck. Bad Boy was a friendly, active little fellow. Just as she'd done with Nod, Jean made a home for him in a box. But Bad Boy had a hard time staying put. He often managed to escape, and, whenever Jean tried to put him back, he gave her another pinch with his claws.

As he grew, Bad Boy stopped pinching, but remained mischievous. After about a week he made his first short flight, spurred on by the sight of food—grasshoppers. In a few more weeks his feathers had fully arrived and he flew like an expert.

It was time for Jean to train Bad Boy, to teach him to hunt at her command. Frank and John showed her how to place him on a perch, and then whistle a call for him to come get the food she held. They showed her how to put pieces of leather—called jesses—over his feet with the falconers' knot that never tightens. A leash fastened to the jesses keeps the bird from flying away. Falcons first learn how to come when called, then they are taught how to capture small birds or other animals. Trained falcons bring the food to their masters, who later feed them.

Bad Boy learned quickly. However, training a falcon requires much patience, commitment, and repetition. Sometimes John, Frank, and her father criticized Jean for not spending enough time with Bad Boy. Luckily, at Craigheads, she had more time for training him than she did at home during the school year. Nonetheless, swimming and canoeing often sounded like more fun than giving Bad Boy a hunting lesson.

Despite such temptations, Jean worked hard, often getting up at dawn to fly Bad Boy before other activities interfered. Her efforts paid off. Bad Boy became a hunter and a dependable pet. Jean could set him free to explore the trees and fields around Craigheads—then, when she whistled, Bad Boy flew right to her.

Bad Boy seemed to like Craigheads as much as Jean did. She fed him grasshoppers, sparrows, and bits of meat. When she threw him a morsel of meat, he could pluck it out of midair. He also liked to take a bath at least once a day, ducking his head underwater and soaking himself.

Everyone had routines at Craigheads, one of which was “quiet hour.” All the cousins were expected to settle down and read for a while after lunch. Jean usually enjoyed the time alone in her room. Every summer she brought a big bag of books from the library in her neighborhood. When she finished these, she went to the attic to choose more from boxes that had belonged to Grandmother Craighead, dusty volumes written by such literary masters as Dickens, Thoreau, Wadsworth, Poe, and Longfellow.

Bad Boy didn’t like to be forgotten, so during quiet hour he often called to Jean from a tree outside her window. He chirped, preened his feathers, and stretched his wings—anything to attract her attention.

One afternoon, as she went to greet him, she spotted Frank and John sneaking toward the creek. *What are they doing down there?* she wondered. *They’re supposed to be in their room.*

An hour or so later she asked them directly, when their mother wasn't around. Her brothers grinned at her like Cheshire cats.

"We were reading *Tom Sawyer*," Frank said. "And got to the part where he climbed out his window to meet Huck," John said.

"So we climbed down the rain spout," Frank continued.

"And shimmied back up just in time to say, 'Mother, can we come down now?'" John said.

One night Jean's parents had guests for dinner. Mrs. Craighead had cooked all day; a feast was waiting on the parlor table: chicken pot pie, homemade biscuits, strawberry jelly, stewed tomatoes, and sliced cucumbers. The whole family gathered for the occasion, even Bad Boy, who perched on top of the dining room door.

Jean watched her father's friend butter a second biscuit, then reach for the strawberry jelly.

"Carolyn," he said. "I don't think I've ever had a better biscuit in my—"

Before he could finish, Bad Boy zoomed down from his perch, straight into the bowl of jelly. A moment later he squawked and flew again, this time to the top of the guest of honor's head!

Jean stared in horror. Instantly, she realized what had happened. Bad Boy had thought the red jelly was a piece of meat.

Their guest quickly regained his composure. He shook

his head slightly and flicked his hand at Bad Boy. Bad Boy flew back to the dining room door. The man wiped a splotch of jelly from his head, then said, "As I was saying, Carolyn, this is an unusually good meal. *Unusual* indeed!"

"Jean," Dr. Craighead said softly. "Why don't you excuse yourself and go feed Bad Boy?"

When Jean got to the kitchen, she started to giggle. "Oh, you *are* a bad boy," she told her falcon. "But I love you all the same."

Bad Boy accompanied Jean to Craigheads for several summers. Back in Washington, he often slept in her room.

One terrible day, however, Jean found his lifeless body beneath a telephone pole. She cradled the feathered form, sobbing. Someone had shot Bad Boy with a BB gun.

"It's not fair!" Jean cried out angrily. Bad Boy had learned to trust humans, and look what had happened. She carried him back to the house.

Mrs. Craighead stroked Jean's hair. "I know it's a terrible lesson," she said softly. "People can be so cruel to animals. The only thing we can do is try to teach other people to love and respect them as much as we do."

Chapter 6

Problems on the Potomac

Her father raised one eyebrow as he looked into the basket. At times his rigid rules made June sad. She could not always fit them. At other times his rules were the shield she seemed to need.

The Summer of the Falcon

Fourteen-year-old Jean and her cousin Paula talked excitedly as Dr. Craighead drove toward another of his favorite spots along the Potomac River, this one near Seneca Dam. They were going to camp overnight. Now that Frank and John were away at college, Dr. Craighead took Jean on his adventures more often.

Usually Frank and John helped Dr. Craighead take care of camp chores, but now it would be Jean's turn. Like most scientists, Jean's father wanted things done with precision and care. Jean couldn't wait to prove what a good camper she was.

The instant they arrived, Jean said, "Don't worry, Dad—Paula and I will pitch the tent. We don't need any help."

"Great," Dr. Craighead said, grinning. "In that case, I'll do a little fishing."

He disappeared and the girls went to work. The tent was bulky and heavy, but after plenty of grunts and groans and some minor disagreements, they got it up. Next, Jean and Paula retrieved the sleeping bags from the car and put them inside the tent. They were off to a good start.

The girls ran to the river to tell Dr. Craighead they were done. "It was easy," Jean said, stretching the truth a bit. "Wait until you see how smooth the canvas is. Not one wrinkle!"

Jean grabbed her father's hand and pulled him to their campsite. Dr. Craighead took one look at the tent and frowned.

"Take it down," he said.

Jean stared. *What does he mean?* she wondered. *Has he gone crazy?*

"What's wrong, Uncle Frank?" Paula finally asked.

"Look at the trail," Dr. Craighead said, his tone softening. "You've pitched the tent right in the middle of it. Fishermen use this path day and night."

He helped them take down the tent and move it a safe distance away.

"What should we do now?" Jean said. Maybe she could redeem herself.

Dr. Craighead handed her a bait bucket. Jean took it with a smile.

"Come on, Paula," she said.

"Where are we going?"

"To the dam. To get hellgrammites."

"Hellgrammites?"

"That's right. They're stone fly larva. Dad uses them for bait."

Jean waded into the Potomac and climbed the large, loose rocks that formed Seneca Dam. The river flowed quickly here and the rocks were slick. The dam sent some of the river water into the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, which parallels the Potomac for many miles.

Jean felt better now. She had done this job many times before, never with any trouble. She showed Paula how to spot the insects clinging to the rocks, and before long they had more than enough.

"Good night, hellgrammites!" Jean said, peering into the bucket. Just as she glanced at Paula, ready to proclaim the job done, she lost her balance.

She lunged for Paula, and they both landed on their rear ends at the bottom of the dam. One look at each other in stunned silence and they burst out laughing.

Finally, Jean pulled herself up. She was wet and had a few scrapes, but she was otherwise all right.

She suddenly remembered the bucket.

The girls looked everywhere—even climbed back up the dam—but it was gone, somewhere at the bottom of the river.

Back at camp, Dr. Craighead was waiting, his arms folded, his face stern. "I saw you," he said. "Laughing. Fooling around. No wonder you lost the bucket."

"Dad," Jean said, "We were laughing because we were scared."

"Could have fooled me," Dr. Craighead muttered.

Things got even worse at supper time. Dr. Craighead was known for his many theories about food; he often experimented with different diets. By now Jean was so used to his changing menus that nothing seemed particularly strange. Not even the baby food he had brought along to eat this evening.

Jean placed the small tins on top of the campfire coals. Soon the soggy stuff would be just the right temperature.

Boom! One of the tins exploded. Glop flew everywhere. Thankfully, no one was hurt.

Dr. Craighead grabbed a stick and pushed the other tins away from the fire.

Jean ran down to the river, away from her father, away from all her mistakes. She climbed into an old, abandoned rowboat that was rotting in the water. At first she was angry. She could never please her father; she could never be as perfect as her brothers. Over and over she envisioned the baby food exploding. How could she have forgotten to poke a hole in the lid? When she stopped seeing the explosions, she thought about the hellgrammites. And the tent.

Something flopped in the bottom of the boat. Night was coming, but there was enough light left for Jean to lean over and see a stranded catfish. *How did it get here?* she wondered. *Poor thing. Just like me—a flop.*

Jean gently lifted the fish and returned it to the river. *There you go,* she whispered. *Free.*

After a while Dr. Craighead wandered down.

"A funny thing happened, Dad," she told him. "A fish was trapped in here. I let him go."

"That fish," her father said, "was going to be breakfast. I caught him while you and Paula were putting up the tent."

That was the last mistake of the day. Jean went to bed. Everyone slept well and had a hearty breakfast the next morning, even without the fish. Jean and Paula packed and loaded the car.

Everything's in its place, Jean thought proudly, slamming the car door shut. *Finally, we did something right.*

As they drove away from Seneca Dam, Jean breathed a sigh of relief. This was one camping trip she was glad to see end.

Near the end of the dirt road, close to the highway, Dr. Craighead asked, "Girls, did you get the tent?"

Jean looked at Paula. Paula looked at Jean.

Dr. Craighead slammed on the brakes and put the car into reverse.

The trip was a disaster, but that was far from the end of Jean's camping days. She would camp many more

times with her family, later with her husband and children, and, eventually, by herself. But that camping trip at Seneca Dam, the worst one of all, is one she remembers well. She learned a lot, especially about what not to do. She would make more mistakes, of course, but never *those* mistakes.

Life, as her father taught her and as all scientists know, is full of trial and error.

Chapter 7

The Lodge and the Shack

We all piled into the car and hurried up to Seneca around nine. First of all our shoes and socks and coats came off and then we set out to look for pretty islands in the canoe.

Jean Craighead's diary
April 18, 1937

Jean continued to dance, draw, and write. She discovered the poems of Walt Whitman, and, as she got older, experimented with a variety of styles in her own writing.

Once, when she showed her mother a new poem, Mrs. Craighead said, "The ones you used to write were much nicer, Jean."

Jean was devastated. Those old poems her mother liked were childish. After that, Jean kept her poetry to herself, hidden away in her closet.

Jean also discovered journalism, and, at Woodrow Wilson High School, became editor of the school newspaper. She liked Latin, German, and science, but best of all, she liked reading Shakespeare. Her English teacher, Mrs. Lumsden, made Shakespeare's plays come alive. By the end of her junior year, Jean had memorized all the lines from *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth*. She even knew what pages the lines were on.

As much as she liked school, however, Jean was never one to spend all of her time studying. In her free time she escaped to two favorite places: the Hodge Podge Lodge and the Shack.

Jean was always fascinated with hiding places, and whenever she and her mother went to antique stores, Jean looked for old desks and sat down, searching for secret compartments. There was usually at least one, and Jean knew how to find it.

Back at home, Jean and her cousins needed their own hiding places. Mrs. Craighead and Aunt Polly didn't approve of makeup, so the girls hid lipstick and rouge under clumps of grass in Jean's yard. They wore their secret stash when together, then wiped it off before going home.

Sometimes they even met outside at night. After reading about Tom Sawyer's escapades, Jean started climbing

out her bedroom window, onto the front-porch roof, and down the nearby hemlock tree—until her father found out and cut the tree down.

One day the girls spotted some lumber in the yard and asked Dr. Craighead if they could build a clubhouse. He agreed—on the condition that it not stay up long—it was close to the house and too much of a fire hazard to remain in the yard for an extended period. Dr. Craighead framed the structure and taught the girls carpentry skills: how to saw, nail, put on the roof, and hang the door.

The three cousins decided to call their clubhouse “Hodge Podge Lodge.” Inside they built secret compartments in the walls and floor—an even better place for concealing makeup and notes—and decorated the walls with their artwork. They added a small table and three chairs so they could picnic, read, and write invisible messages in lemon juice—the words appeared when they exposed the paper to heat.

All sorts of imaginary worlds came to life in the Hodge Podge Lodge. After reading about Egypt, they made up their own pharaoh, named Ammo. The cousins built an altar to the ancient ruler, complete with small elephant statues an aunt and uncle had brought from China. Jean, Ellen, and Paula would rub the elephants and be magically transported to imaginary stone mazes leading around Pharaoh Ammo’s pyramid. In these labyrinths they sometimes encountered Ammo’s wife; they even ended up back in North America, in a forest where they danced and tried to cast Egyptian spells on beetles and birds.

One day, however, the girls were too busy to travel to

imaginary worlds. Jean called an emergency meeting. As he had promised, Dr. Craighead had announced that it was time to get rid of the Lodge.

At first everyone was silent, then Paula spoke. "We can't tear it down," she said. "We worked so hard to build it."

"It's ours," Ellen said. "Can't you make Uncle Frank understand?"

Jean shook her head. She knew there was no point arguing with her father, especially when he was worried about safety.

"Too bad we didn't build it in our yard," Ellen said.

The three cousins sat around the table looking glum, imagining their headquarters reduced to rubble.

Suddenly Jean jumped up. "We don't have to tear it down," she said. "We can move it!"

A few days later, Jean, Paula, and Ellen did just that. Aunt Polly had given them the go-ahead to bring the Lodge to their house, and somehow the girls managed to heave it on top of two wagons. They took turns moving the load—two pulled the wagons while the other pushed from behind. They left the Craighead yard, maneuvered onto the sidewalk, rounded the corner, crossed Jennifer Street, and—

Crash!

A corner of the Hodge Podge Lodge had slipped off one of the wagons. Jean grabbed another corner and shoved with all her might against a wall, making sure the remaining wagon stayed in place.

"Help!" Paula shouted.

Ellen ran for help. Luckily, a football game was in progress at the Zirpels', so she returned with her younger brother Irving and some of his friends. After much pushing and shoving, the Hodge Podge Lodge was deposited safely in Ellen's and Paula's back yard. There it stayed for many years, a haven for numerous secret proceedings.

Meanwhile, Dr. Craighead had decided that since the family spent so much time up the river, they needed their own parcel of land. He bought several acres near Seneca Dam.

The property contained a small, white-washed building that came to be known as "the Shack." As the name implied, it was modest, with one bedroom upstairs, a living area downstairs, and a kitchen in an attached lean-to. Mrs. Craighead made calico curtains for the kitchen, which contained a table and chairs. There was no stove or electricity; the Craigheads cooked over a fireplace. A spring at the bottom of the hill served as a refrigerator, an outhouse as the bathroom.

The family spent years fixing up the place during weekend visits. Jean helped chip paint off the mantel, put up knotty pine boards on the walls, and chop oak logs into shake shingles for the springhouse roof.

The Potomac River passed by at the bottom of the hill, about 300 yards from the Shack. Dr. Craighead was always planting something—wild chestnut, cypress, and pear trees. He also dynamited a hole for a pond, where he raised bass and bluegills.

Jean loved the Shack, as did her friends. On one visit she brought along a friend named Judy. Her brothers were there, too, home from college for the summer.

As usual, as soon as they arrived, Dr. Craighead jumped out of the car. Something was up; he hurried in empty-handed, without a load of food or fishing equipment. Jean watched him disappear inside the Shack. A few minutes later he returned as though nothing had happened. The same thing happened every time they came. Next time, Jean decided, she'd find out what was going on.

Now it was time to give Judy a tour. They were almost to the door when Jean noticed Judy's feet. "Back to the car, Judy," she said, "and take off your shoes and socks. We go barefoot here."

Judy grinned and did as she had been told.

Before long Dr. Craighead jumped into one of the canoes they kept by the river. His latest interest was to map all the islands along this stretch of the Potomac.

"I'll be back for supper," he called out. "Go make a living off the place while I'm gone."

"What does *that* mean?" Judy asked.

"He wants us to find food," Jean explained.

"Didn't you bring food?"

Jean nodded. "He means wild things."

Judy still looked puzzled, so Jean said, "You'll see."

She took her friend out in one of the canoes—her brothers had taken another to check on a bald eagle's nest. Jean paddled; Judy didn't know how and the river was tricky. Jean was confident, however; she had learned to

shoot rapids here. Both girls laughed as the white water splashed their faces, but Judy held onto the canoe for dear life.

Once they had passed into calmer waters, Jean said, "Let's fish here."

That night they feasted on catfish the girls pulled in and cattails retrieved by Frank and John.

"That's one of the best meals I've ever had," Judy said.

They headed home that evening. They often stayed overnight, but this visit was just a day trip.

"I'd like to come again," Judy said when they dropped her off at her house. She waved and ran inside, shoes in hand, still barefoot.

The phone was ringing when the Craighheads returned home. Mrs. Craighead answered as Jean went upstairs to her room.

Soon Mrs. Craighead knocked on Jean's door and came in, wearing a puzzled expression.

"What's wrong?" Jean asked.

"That was Judy's mother." Mrs. Craighead paused, then said, "She doesn't want Judy to go to the Shack again."

"Why not?"

"She's upset because Judy went barefoot."

"Barefoot? You're kidding."

"Her mother doesn't think it's ladylike." Mrs. Craighead shook her head in bewilderment.

Jean groaned. She had heard her own share of lectures on the subject of being ladylike—sit straight, dress neatly, talk respectfully—but never a word, thankfully, about going barefoot in the woods.

Jean thought about Judy and her mother the rest of the evening. She was starting to realize that her family was—well—unusual. Not everyone kept vultures and falcons as pets. Not everyone knew how to make a rabbit trap or build a bed from hemlock branches. Some girls weren't even allowed to go barefoot.

The next visit to the Shack, Jean was ready to do some detective work. When her father hopped out of the car, she followed on his heels. He walked quickly, but Jean kept up.

"Dad," she asked. "Where are you going?"

"Come on," he said. "I'll show you."

After opening up the Shack, Dr. Craighead headed straight for the stairs to the second floor. They walked into the bedroom. He stopped and pointed at the bed.

There lay a black snake, curled up, asleep.

"He stays here when we're not around," Dr. Craighead said.

He tugged at the bedspread and gently woke the reptile. Jean watched it uncoil, slither off the bed, and disappear through a hole in the wall.

"If your mother saw this snake," Dr. Craighead said, "she'd have his head. But he's a good housekeeper—he eats rats and mice."

"He'll hide out until we leave," Dr. Craighead added, turning to go downstairs. He put his finger to his lips and whispered, "Our little secret, Jean."

Jean nodded and smiled. The snake was safe in its hiding place—she knew how to keep a secret.

Chapter 8

Penn State

Oh, what a great sport to dream about college. I am so excited I can hardly live. My courses sound wonderful, I sure hope I can repay Dad for all he's doing.

Jean Craighead's diary
September 5, 1937

She was finally here! Jean sat in the student union of Pennsylvania State University. People milled about everywhere—some chatting, some checking class schedules—all of them seeming to be in a hurry, or at least

knowing where they belonged. Everyone except Jean, who wanted to take a few moments to soak in all the unfamiliar faces, to listen in on conversations as they drifted by.

This is amazing, she thought. Nobody watching me. Nobody on my back. No chores! I can do whatever I want.

She remembered the discussion she and her father had had about college; how long ago that seemed.

"You can go to George Washington University and live here at home," he had said, "or go to Penn State."

The decision had been easy. George Washington University was just a trolley ride away, and Jean wasn't about to live at home. She wanted to be on her own. Her father had gone to Penn State, her brothers were here, and now it was her turn.

Frank and John were juniors, and, as always, everyone knew who they were. They were so busy she probably wouldn't see them often, but it was nice knowing they were nearby. Not only were they good students, they were intercollegiate wrestling champs, with crowds flocking to their matches.

What would she be? Jean wondered. She planned to major in English and science. That had been another easy decision, since she loved words, books, animals, and the natural world.

I may be free as a bird, Jean realized suddenly, *but I'd better get busy. There's a lot to learn, and I'm the only one who can make it happen.*

She stood up. It was time to go buy her books.

College was everything Jean had hoped for—and more. She made close friends. She and several other students started a literary magazine called *Portfolio*. She was class secretary and a member of the modern dance group.

She studied animal behavior with C. R. Carpenter, a pioneer in his field. During his investigations of howling monkeys, red spider monkeys, and rhesus monkeys, he frequently invited Jean to watch film footage. As the monkeys jumped, screeched, ate, and climbed, Carpenter explained that entire dramas were unfolding before their eyes—every action had significance. Some monkeys were leaders, others were followers, and individuals and families had friendships as well as feuds. Jean's father had already shown her how exciting the animal world was; now she was learning even more about scientific ways of observing. In the past, she had gotten to know all kinds of family pets, but now she was learning about groups of animals—animal societies.

Best of all, perhaps, was her poetry professor, Theodore Roethke. He was a bear of a man, young, funny, and passionate about poetry. More than anything, he wanted to be the best poet alive; later, in the 1950s, he would win a Pulitzer Prize.

For all that college had to offer, however, Penn State was an isolated place in the Allegheny Mountains. Jean missed the many lectures and events she was used to attending in Washington. She knew, however, that many visitors would be thrilled to see these mountains. With that in mind, she came up with a plan to bring outstanding artists and writers to campus.

Jean and other staff members of *Portfolio* decided they wanted to meet W. H. Auden, a renowned British poet who had recently immigrated to the United States. They invited him to spend a long weekend in a log cabin the college owned in the woods. The students couldn't afford to pay Auden for his time; all they had to offer was scenery.

He agreed to come.

Jean was awed by the tall, quiet man. During his visit she watched him like a hawk as he walked the trails and gazed down to the valleys. Whenever he and Roethke discussed poetry in front of the students, Jean watched as he sprang to life, offering opinions of such poets as William Carlos Williams and Stanley Kunitz. Jean remained unusually quiet, but took in every word. Some students showed Auden their poems, but Jean didn't dare show him any of hers.

She was, of course, sharing her poems with Roethke, who pronounced her writing good. He taught her what writing is all about: revising, working, and revising some more, until each word is the best it can be. He suggested ways she could improve, and Jean was often astonished at how much she learned from his remarks. Roethke's criticism was always gentle, never destructive. Sometimes, however, he forced her to think carefully about her future.

One day he and Jean were walking underneath a canopy of elm trees near one of the main buildings on campus.

"I need to talk to you, Jean," he said, "... about a difficult decision."

He explained to her that Smith College, a prestigious women's college in Massachusetts, was holding a poetry contest.

"Only one student can represent Penn State," he continued. "I should send you—your deliverance and personality would probably win."

Jean smiled proudly, imagining herself reading her poetry aloud before the judges.

Roethke stopped and put his hand on her shoulder. "But I think Maxine West is a better poet," he said. "I'm going to send her instead."

His words echoed like deafening bells in Jean's mind. She faintly heard Roethke say, "Please don't be upset."

She nodded, trying to hide her disappointment. Maxine was a good friend, and Jean knew she had talent. But to hear that Maxine was a better poet—this was almost more than Jean could bear.

By now they had reached the main campus gate.

"I've got to go," Jean said, and ran from her professor's side.

Jean could not stop thinking about Roethke's words. She knew he hadn't intended to hurt her feelings. *He had said she could probably win the contest, but he had said she wasn't the best.* Jean thought about her other writing courses, those focusing on short stories and essays. *She was the best writer in these classes.*

Maybe, just maybe, she thought, I'm not really a poet. Maybe I should concentrate on prose instead.

Difficult as the encounter was, in the end it turned out to be helpful. Prose *was* where Jean's strongest talents lay.

On another occasion, Roethke offered some additional advice worth pondering.

Jean had always had many interests. At various times she wanted to be a writer, an artist, a dancer, a swimmer, a politician, and a scientist. Even now, in college, she managed to be involved in all of these activities in one way or another. She spent hours painting, dancing, and studying art, in between nearly blowing herself up several times in chemistry lab. On top of that, there was German club, medieval banquets, parties, dances, boys—and more. Her classmates voted her Most Versatile Senior Woman.

Knowing how busy she was, Roethke once remarked: “Jean, you need to make up your mind about what you’re going to be. If you don’t, you’re going to spread yourself too thin—and end up doing nothing well.”

This time her professor’s comment wasn’t upsetting, simply thought-provoking. Jean knew she couldn’t keep up with everything she loved; she would have to make choices. Of course, in the end she chose writing, but the decision was difficult, and took a while to resolve, especially since she liked art and dancing so much.

Jean remained in touch with Roethke for many years after graduation; he died in 1963. If she could, she would like to tell her beloved professor: “You were right. It takes all you’ve got to do one thing well. I have found, however, that varied interests—like a rich range of friends, skills, studies in various fields—add to the beauty of the pool from which a writer fishes for words and thoughts.”

Chapter 9

Reporting Days

A young fellow who has been studying much of his life on the matter of blowing up nations with an atom would like to get a wage increase from the War Labor Board. . . . Now this young man is no fictional character; he is very much alive, and very much kicking. But, because of the secret nature of his work, his name cannot be published.

Jean Craighead

"Just an Atom-Smasher," The Washington Post

October 31, 1943

When will this interview be over? Jean wondered as she looked around the busy offices of the International News Service.

It was 1942 and the world was at war. Most young men were being shipped overseas to fight, and the frowning bureau chief in front of her needed a new reporter. Jean thought she had the job, but even so, the man didn't seem happy, and she couldn't wait to escape.

So much had happened since graduation from Penn State. First, there was the scholarship to Louisiana State University. Initially Jean was happy there, earning her master's degree, studying fresco painting, and teaching modern dance. But after the invasion of Pearl Harbor on December 7 and the United States' entry into the war, her studies suddenly seemed self-indulgent. Hitler was destroying Europe, people were dying, and this hardly seemed the time to be holed up in a classroom.

Instead, Jean decided she should be out in the world writing. So she had moved back home to find a job in Washington, which was why she was sitting in front of this grouchy man.

Jean's thoughts were interrupted—the editor was telling her when to report for work. But there were tears in his eyes.

"This is the end of the newspaper business," he said.

Jean couldn't imagine what he meant. *Had something terrible happened, something she hadn't heard about? Were foreign troops invading?*

"What's wrong?" she said, bracing herself for bad news.

The editor looked Jean squarely in the eye. "I just hired a woman."

Jean couldn't believe her ears. "I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me," he growled. "Women shouldn't be reporters. It's rough out there. A man's world. But this war doesn't leave me any choice."

Jean left as quickly as she could. *This man has no idea what women can do, she told herself. I'm going to have to show him.*

Jean remembered that her mother had been in a similar situation before getting married. After Jean's grandfather had died, the family couldn't afford to send her mother to college. So, at age 16, Carolyn Johnson had gone to work as an entomological apprentice at the Smithsonian Institution.

Before long a better job opened up, that of entomological assistant. The position would be a promotion, and Carolyn's family needed extra money. To qualify, however, candidates had to pass the Civil Service Exam for professional scientists, which women were being allowed to take for the first time.

"If I score higher than the men," Carolyn asked her boss, "will I get the job?"

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

Carolyn studied hard. Her handsome new friend, Frank Craighead, drilled her with question after question. Carolyn passed with flying colors, scoring higher than the men. Even so, she didn't get the promotion.

Carolyn knew she was being treated unfairly, so she reminded her boss of his promise.

"You are right," he finally said. "I promised you. You get the job."

And now I've got the job, Jean thought. I guess we

Craighead women just have to keep proving to men what we can do.

Jean didn't have to work directly with the bullheaded bureau chief. He still didn't like women reporters. In fact, whenever he saw Jean, he looked away.

Instead, she reported to an editor she admired very much, a man named Robert Humphreys, who was in favor of women reporters. "Start hiring them early," he had advised the bureau chief, "so we get the best ones."

Jean loved her job. Soon she was writing front-page articles. An uncle who worked for the War Production Board and another in the State Department helped her track down home-front stories. She also covered Capitol Hill and the Labor Department.

Several times—when the regular White House correspondent was sick or on another assignment—Jean covered presidential press conferences. Reporters crowded about everywhere, but there, at the front of the room was one of her heroes, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In person, he was just as Jean had imagined: intelligent, charming, and distinguished-looking. Hands clasped before him, the president spoke in a voice of reason, so reassuring amidst all the chaos of the war.

Heart pounding, Jean took careful notes, but didn't dare ask any questions. At the end of each press conference, she ran to a phone and called in her story to International News Service.

As much as she liked working with Robert Humphreys, however, Jean changed jobs in 1943. At that time the only way to get a raise was to "job-jump," so Jean became a reporter on the national desk of *The Washington Post*.

One day she heard about a young physicist in St. Louis who had asked for a raise, but whose request had been turned down by the War Labor Board. The physicist was conducting research using a machine called a cyclotron, also known as an "atom-smasher." Jean had learned about cyclotrons in her college physics class. At the time, her professor had predicted that the next war would be won by the country that first discovered how to split the atom and harness the resulting energy into a bomb.

Jean believed that the St. Louis physicist deserved a raise. After all, he was conducting vital research, work that might help the United States win the war. If he didn't deserve a raise, who did?

Jean knew she had a story. She went home and dug out her old college physics book, published before the United States went to war. She also needed more up-to-date information, so she called one of her friend's brothers, a 19-year-old physics major at George Washington University named Geoff Chew. With Geoff's help, she filled in the scientific details she needed for her story: references to isotopes, alpha particles, and uranium, the metal being used to make atomic bombs.

Jean called her article about the cyclotron scientist "Just an Atom-Smasher." It appeared in the Sunday edition of *The Washington Post* along with two of her own

illustrations, imaginative sketches of what an “atom-smasher” bomb and the resulting explosion—complete with a stadium for viewing—might look like. Her article had a mildly ironic tone, but her message was deadly serious: Any scientist working on such important research deserved a raise.

Early Monday morning, the day after the article was published, a tall military officer strode into the newsroom and tapped Jean on the shoulder. In one hand he held a copy of her story.

“Miss Craighead?” he said.

“Yes?”

“Where did you get this information?”

“Who are you?”

“I’m a lieutenant in the U.S. Army, investigating a matter of national security.”

For a moment Jean could only stare, flabbergasted. Then she sputtered, “What do you mean?”

“For a reporter, you seem to know a lot about atomic research. Who gave you this information?”

Jean didn’t know what to say. This man obviously thought she had talked to a scientist who had leaked information. She didn’t have any “secret sources”; all she had done was review her physics book and talk to Geoff. She was embarrassed, in fact, at how straightforward her efforts had been. She certainly didn’t want to get Geoff in any kind of trouble for helping her out. Finally, she simply replied, “A good reporter never reveals her sources.”

"Your editor said you should talk to me," the lieutenant snapped. "So start talking."

Jean's face reddened. Now she felt she had no choice but to answer his questions. Nervously, she told him about Geoff and her old textbook, but could tell the lieutenant still wasn't convinced. He thought she was hiding something. He kept asking the same things over and over.

At last he said, "Where can I find Geoff Chew?"

Jean told him, then watched as he left. She was glad to see him go, but worried about Geoff.

Geoff was also questioned. In the next few weeks, he and Jean were sure their phones were being tapped. Luckily, they had nothing to conceal. Geoff had simply made some educated guesses about bomb research and nuclear fission. His hunches were so impressive, however, that a few weeks later, he had a new job. The United States government hired him and sent him to Los Alamos, New Mexico, to join scientists secretly developing atomic bombs.

Jean continued her reporting work, but something else was occupying her mind. After Penn State, her brothers had gone to graduate school at the University of Michigan. For months they had been telling Jean about their roommate, a fellow named John George. Not too long before Jean wrote the atom-smasher article, he had called and asked to meet her.

Several days later the doorbell rang and Jean opened

her front door to find a handsome, six-foot man standing before her in a navy uniform.

"I'm John George," he said.

John had joined the navy and was now an ensign whose home port was the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York. He invited Jean out for dinner and dancing.

Jean was especially attracted to his warm smile and his intelligence. All the Craighheads liked him; he obviously liked Jean. The first night of his visit, Jean's grandmother whispered, "He wants to marry you, Jean."

John stayed with the Craighheads for two days. On the second day, Jean took him to the Shack for a day on the river. John loved nature, especially birds, so they had plenty to talk about.

Jean was sad to see him leave, but he returned at Thanksgiving. And Jean's grandmother was right. At Christmas John made another trip to Washington, this time to propose.

A marriage proposal! The idea surprised Jean and worried her some. John George was handsome and charming, but they hardly knew each other.

John, however, was insistent. Like most young men going to war at that time, he feared he might never return. He wanted to be married—to Jean—and that was that.

Like many young women who received such proposals, Jean finally said yes. They were married on January 28, 1944. Soon after, John George went to sea in the North Atlantic.

Jean's brothers had also left the University of Michigan and joined the navy. They created a survival program

for naval flyers who might be stranded in enemy territory. They tested it themselves—the Naval Air Force dropped them on a Pacific atoll for six months to make sure the program worked. Their book, *How To Survive on Land and Sea*, became standard issue for U.S. Navy pilots.

Since John's home port was in Brooklyn, in 1945 Jean moved there to be nearby whenever his ship was in. She got a job as an artist and reporter for United Features, and later worked as an artist for *Pageant* magazine.

In August of that year, the United States dropped atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.

Jean was dumbfounded. The enormity of the bombings was too much to comprehend. It was Sunday morning and she was alone in her apartment, staring at headlines in *The New York Times*. The phone rang.

"Jean, this is Ben Gilbert."

Ben Gilbert had been one of Jean's editors at *The Washington Post*.

"Send us that atom-smasher article of yours," he said. "I want to take another look at it, but we can't find it. It's been cut out of all our old papers." Jean hung up and searched her files. She couldn't find her copy either; she must have misplaced it. Later, she and Gilbert realized that her article had so concerned United States intelligence officials that they had ordered it censored, cut out of most newspapers.

For the moment, though, Jean stared out her apartment window at the New York City skyline. Her husband

was aboard a destroyer, on his way to Japan that very minute.

If they were lucky, the war would finally end. John would soon come home. A whole new life lay ahead.



*Jean Craighead in
Ottawa, Canada, 1923*



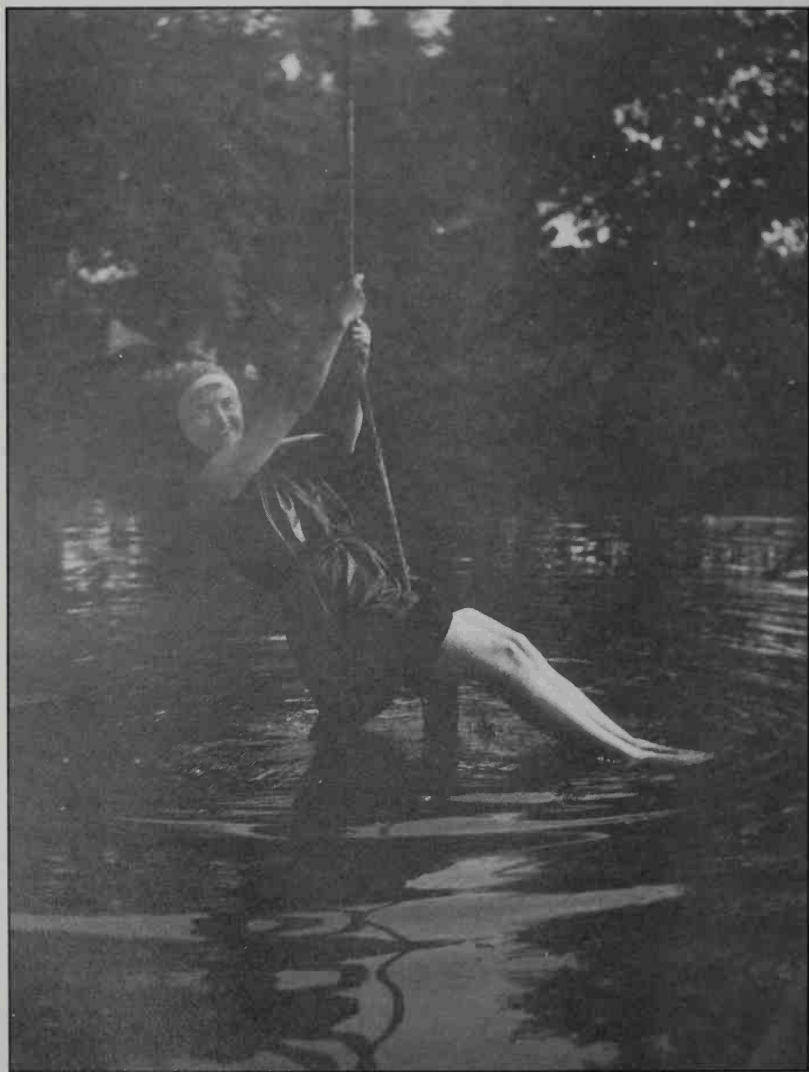
*Jean Craighead, as a member of the Carolyn McKinley Interpretive
Dance Group, 1931*



The neighborhood girls at Craigheads, PA, 1936 (Jean is on the right)



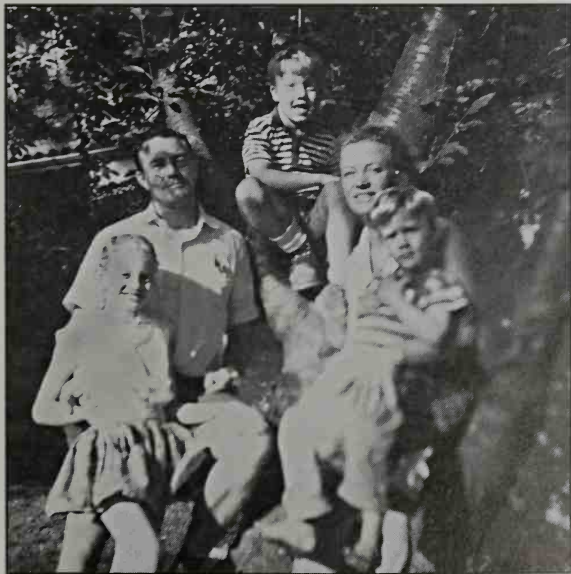
Jean Craighead with her mother at "the Shack," in Seneca, Maryland, 1943



Jean Craighead in 1936



Ellen Zirpel, Frank Craighead, Spike the dog, Morgan Berthrong, Trigger the dog, and Jean Craighead on the Potomac River in 1936



*John and Jean
with Twig, Craig,
and Luke in 1961*



Jean and John, 1960



*Jean with her daughter, Twig, and her sister-in-law, Esther, in
Moose, WY, 1954*



Photo credit: Harper Portraits

Jean Craighead George with Yammer the owl, 1964



Jean in 1964 with Tonka the Newfoundland and Trinket the cat



Photo credit: Ellen Young

Luke, Craig, and Twig George in 1964



Photo credit: Ellen Young

Jean with artist Tom Melvin in front of the trompe l'oeil mural he painted for her home, 1973



*Jean with Barbara Dana and Koda, the gray wolf,
in Heber Valley, Utah, 1994*



Jean's home in Chappaqua, New York

Chapter 10

Beginnings

I was ready to marry—all of me except for that spark in the far right-hand corner that makes each one of us different from everyone else. In that far corner, my own belief in myself as a writer still held out.

Journey Inward

Before Jean had moved to New York, she decided she needed something creative to work on in her spare time, especially when John was overseas. She had decided to try children's books, where she could combine two of her favorite things: writing and painting. She wanted to

show children the wonders of animals and nature—to share all the things she had learned from her father and brothers. First of all, she wanted to write exciting stories, but she also wanted to include real-life details—scientific facts.

When she had taken John to the Shack, she had introduced him to an old family friend named Buck Queen, who lived next door. A gentle, white-haired man with a big smile, he raised and trained hunting dogs. He also hunted foxes.

Buck hadn't always lived in his small cabin; earlier he had lived in a fancier home. But when his wife died, he had left that house and told friends to take what they wanted because he was moving to Seneca. He loved the woods there, and he and his dogs roamed them day and night.

For hours Jean and John listened to Buck's stories. John was so fascinated he even took notes. He hoped to make a career of nature, and John wanted to be sure to remember everything Buck said after the war ended. Jean was impressed by his careful approach.

Buck told them about one fox who loved to be chased—each night the animal came and called to his dog, Brownie, and off they would go. Jean and John even went along on some night hunts, running after Brownie as he chased foxes and treed a raccoon or two.

Back at home, Jean decided Buck's stories would be perfect for children, just the right combination of adventure and animal lore. She began writing and illustrating a picture book about a male fox who lived by the Potomac.

And, as luck would have it, someone gave her just what she needed for her project: a fox pup.

A Maryland hunter had trapped her mother; the pup's leg had been broken. After Jean nursed the fox back to health, the fox began to play with Jean at night. Jean named her Fulva, after the scientific name for a red fox, *Vulpes fulva*.

Fulva was a beautiful little creature who loved ice cream. She made a den in Jean's fireplace, and sometimes Jean worked on the book with the fox curled around her shoulders. And, with Fulva as a model, she could make her illustrations just right.

Jean decided to move to New York not long after she finished the illustrations. But she didn't want Fulva to be cooped up all the time in a city apartment. So, before she left, she gave Fulva to the Washington Zoo. Fulva seemed to like her new home; she followed the zoo keeper everywhere on his rounds.

Of course, Jean hoped to have her book published. Since New York was the heart of the publishing industry, Jean decided to give her luck a try. She particularly admired a book called *Gay Neck, the Story of a Pigeon*, by Dhan Gopal Mukerji. Since it had been published by E. P. Dutton, Jean wondered if Dutton might be interested in her fox story. She arranged an appointment with an editor there, a woman named Marguerite Vance.

The big day arrived and Jean handed Vance her story and illustrations. She watched the editor's face carefully, looking for clues about how she liked it.

Finally, Vance peered up and said, "This is nice, but

you know so much more about this fox. Go home and write about him from birth to death. Do it in about 150 pages, double-spaced."

Jean was thrilled, but much work lay ahead. She dug out John's notes about Buck Queen's fox stories. While gazing out the window and watching the lights come on one by one across New York City, she was reminded of the stars twinkling over the Potomac River. She remembered the eerie sounds of moonlit fox hunts on such nights, of Buck's hound dogs baying as they picked up the scent and trailed their prey.

Jean wrote just the story Vance had asked for. The fox was named Vulpes; his mate was named Fulva. Vulpes' biography began with his birth on a chilly, rainy April day. Buck Queen and his blue tick hound, Brownie, were also characters—the hunter and dog always hunting for Vulpes. The novel was full of real-life details: how Vulpes felt the first time he crawled out of his den, how his brother was eaten by a great horned owl, how Vulpes outsmarted Buck and Brownie. In the end, however, Buck kills Vulpes.

Jean felt the story could not succeed without being as factual as possible, so when John came home from the war she asked him to add some ideas and paragraphs of his own, especially observations of birds and animals. Their courtship had been so short, and after so much time away from each other, Jean thought working together would be a good way for them to become reacquainted.

Vance loved the new manuscript. Dutton published *Vulpes, the Red Fox*, listing the authors as John and Jean

George. Even though Jean had done most of the writing and all of the illustrations, John's name was first. Jean didn't even think to question the order—in those days, men's names *always* came before women's names.

Jean was happy. She wanted to write more books like this one. She hoped her writing would get better and better, as good as it could be. Sometimes she even dared to dream of the greatest honor she could ever earn as a children's writer: a Newbery Medal, awarded each year by the American Library Association to the most outstanding new children's book. But that seemed like a distant fantasy.

At the moment, practical matters needed attention. The first was John's career. He decided to return to the University of Michigan and get a Ph.D. in ecology, the study of the relationships between living things and the environment.

Jean was sad to be leaving city life behind, a world filled with writers, artists, publishers, and editors, people who could help her writing. After being a reporter for so long, she was used to action. And she loved having so many museums, restaurants, and plays right at her fingertips. Michigan would have none of this.

Chapter 11

Tent Life

What I did not know, as I put down my bucket and raised my binoculars to focus on the song sparrow, was the nature of the long odyssey I was beginning. For years I would be encountering wild birds and beasts, living with them, seeing myself in them, and all the while trying to understand what the experience meant to me.

Journey Inward

Jean enjoyed Michigan much more than she thought she would. Once they were settled, she and John were surrounded by new friends day and night. Acquaintances

such as Able, Peggy, and Charlie dropped by with no advance warning. The Georges didn't mind, especially since these feathered friends were such great singers.

Jean and John had moved into a tent, and their new companions were song sparrows. John drove to Ann Arbor for university classes and research, but his real work was here, outside, where he studied birds like Able, Peggy, and Charlie, gathering data necessary for his studies. And if Jean wanted to write books about animals, this was certainly the place to do it.

Amid the rolling farmland of southern Michigan, the Georges had pitched a nine-by-nine-foot army surplus tent on a hill covered with beech and maple trees. The woman who owned the land gave them permission to camp there. Her fields and forest attracted all sorts of wildlife, and Jean and John had a superb view of a meadow and stream.

They made their tent cozy, equipping it with a real bed, a woodstove for heat, a gasoline stove for cooking, a large work table for both of them (an old door on top of sawhorses), and an old dresser. When winter was at its worst, they rented a small apartment in town, but, even then, they often returned to the tent on weekends. During one weekend visit, when they heard a blizzard was approaching, they decided to stay. It was thrilling to be right in the middle of the wind and wild snow. The next morning, they dug themselves out with a shovel and broom.

As part of his research, John put small bands around the birds' legs to identify each one, then watched and

recorded their activities, roaming the area with his binoculars, clipboards of data sheets, and maps.

Jean got involved, too. She couldn't believe the daily dramas that unfolded: mother birds being eaten by snakes and hawks, fledglings learning to fly, birds returning to the same territory after migrating south. Jean learned to recognize individual birds by their calls, and she learned what their different calls meant: danger, anger, contentment.

A few birds, however, were upset by John's work. One family of robins that lived in an apple tree screamed and dive-bombed John whenever they saw him. They didn't attack anyone else, not Jean, not the woman who owned the land, not delivery people—just John. To avoid the barrage, John tried wearing disguises: hats, raincoats, even one of Jean's skirts—but nothing helped. With a screech, the birds headed straight for his head. They even remembered their feud after migrating south for the winter and returning the following spring.

The only time the robins didn't bother John was when he rode a tractor belonging to one of the local farmers. Because of the way birds see—only a few details, not the big picture—they lost sight of him on the tractor. But as soon as he got off, the battle was on once more.

This was just one of hundreds of details Jean was learning about wildlife, things she could only learn firsthand. She also read scientific articles about other people's findings. Jean learned so much during these years that she decided she would never write about a place unless she lived in it first, a week at the very least.

Before long Jean and John were living with a whole menagerie, including Meph the skunk, a hound dog named Gunner, and a mother raccoon and her two kits—all of them pets, each with distinct personalities. Meph, for instance, developed an incredible appetite for chili con carne. Whenever Jean put it on the stove, Meph stamped his little feet and begged—or, more precisely—demanded a serving.

Most of the time, Jean enjoyed living outdoors. At times, with blue sky overhead and sunshine and birds' songs filling the woods, life here seemed magical.

She often stayed up until two or three in the morning to illustrate and write educational filmstrips, a good way to bring in extra money.

And, with input from John, she was writing and illustrating a series of animal biographies: *Vision, the Mink*; *Masked Prowler: The Story of a Raccoon*; *Meph, the Pet Skunk*; and *Dipper of Copper Creek*.

Occasionally, however, Jean longed for a real home. She wanted to be able to flick on a light, get water from a sink, use a toilet that flushed. Most of all, she wanted children. And she wanted John to finish his Ph.D., which seemed to be taking forever.

These moments usually passed. Then, after four years of tent living, everything happened at once. John got a teaching position in the Zoology Department at Vassar College in New York state. Even better, Jean was expecting a baby.

In the meantime, another newcomer arrived in the household, a horned owl the Georges named Bubo, from

Bubo virginianus. He was young, but big—nearly two feet high, with a wingspan of more than three feet. Remembering her days of training Bad Boy, Jean got some jesses and John taught Bubo to come when called.

Jean and John's baby was due September 18, 1950, the same day John was supposed to drive to Poughkeepsie to report to his new job. Their baby girl arrived just in time to see her father. Jean wanted to name her Carolyn Laura, but once she saw how tiny she was, decided to call her Twig. Her birth certificate reads: Twig Carolyn Laura George.

Even when naming her daughter, Jean thought about nature. Its mysteries and pleasures were getting better all the time.

Chapter 12

Jean's Side of the Mountain

Although wishing to run to the woods and live on our own seems to be an inherited characteristic in our family, we are not unique. Almost everyone I know has dreamed at some time of running away to a distant mountain or island, castle or sailing ship, to live there in beauty and peace. Few of us, however, make it.

preface to My Side of the Mountain

Somehow, the grass is always greener on the other side. When Jean lived in a tent, she had wished for a roof over her head. Now that she lived in an apartment at Vassar, she missed the woods.

At least they had Bubo, which made Jean feel closer to the outdoor world. She was writing and illustrating her sixth animal biography, *Bubo, the Great Horned Owl*. While Twig slept, she watched him fly and hop from perch to perch, from room to room. He ate a steady supply of mice that John brought home from the lab. Often, when Twig cried, Jean whistled and Bubo flew to the back of the rocking chair, a comforting companion to Jean as she soothed her baby.

For a few days, Bubo had company—a bat that had fallen down a dormitory chimney. John brought him home to swoop through the apartment, until he flew out the bathroom vent. Everything from owls and bats to snakes, frogs, and seagulls were part of the George household.

Two more babies arrived—Craig in 1952 and Luke in 1956. Meanwhile, John was enjoying his teaching duties, and, with Jean's urging and help, he eventually finished his thesis, earned a Ph.D., and was promoted to assistant professor.

Even though life was almost always hectic and Jean and John were assigned to several different apartments, a routine began to emerge, one that would sustain Jean for many years. She was a mother and a writer, juggling both at all hours. She wrote and illustrated whenever she could—when the children were napping, in school, or after they had gone to bed. Jean took the children along on her outdoor adventures, exploring the wild together and teaching them the names of plants, animals, and trees, just as her father had taught her when she was a girl.

But there were problems. They had to get rid of Bubo. In one dorm apartment where the Georges lived, a student arrived who was terrified of birds. Since Bubo often stayed outside, leashed, Jean knew there was no other option; she had to turn Bubo loose. She hoped he might stay close and pay visits, perhaps finding a home in the campus trees.

When the time came, John held the bird high. Bubo spread his wings and quickly flew north. He stopped in the graveyard, found a mate, and made a few campus calls. After his mate gave birth, they never saw him again.

At the same time, Jean's confidence in herself as a writer grew each time she wrote a new book. But something bothered her—the literary partnership with her husband. John loved giving lectures and interviews about their books, but sometimes he seemed to forget who was the writer. Even though he enjoyed taking credit, his actual involvement decreased as he became busier at Vassar.

I'm the one doing all the writing, she told herself. John checks things over, makes suggestions now and then. That's it. Shouldn't my name be the only one on the cover? At the very least, my name should come first.

Jean wanted to write her own books, but felt guilty about the idea. However, they needed extra money, so she began writing and illustrating her own picture books, starting with *The Hole in the Tree* and *Snow Tracks*. *The Hole in the Tree* was Jean's first ecology book. It shows how a bark beetle chews a hole in a tree; how fungi, a woodpecker, and a carpenter bee make the hole bigger; how a

chickadee and a raccoon nest there; and, finally, how kids hide things in the hole. In *Snow Tracks*, animals make tracks in the snow at night; in the morning a little boy follows them. The little boy was Craig, although Jean didn't use his name.

In the end, John didn't complain about Jean writing without him, especially picture books. He had decided that other scientists expected him to write scientific articles, not children's books.

Meanwhile, Jean decided that a novel was what she really wanted to write. She even had a story in mind, although she didn't feel ready to write it yet. She often thought about the plot, which involved a boy who lived alone in the woods for a year. She knew how he would survive, that was the easy part. He would train a falcon to hunt—just as she and her brothers had done—so he'd have plenty of meat. He could live in a tree and tan leather for clothes. Jean's father and brothers had taught her so many survival skills that this boy could use: how to light a fire without matches, how to catch and smoke fish, how to catch animals in snares, how to stay warm in cold weather.

The problem was getting him *to* the woods. How could he stay there for an entire year without everyone looking for him?

One morning about this time, when Twig was seven, she announced that she was angry and was going to run away. Jean did her best not to laugh as she remembered her own attempt so long ago, and, before that, her mother's.

In true family tradition, Jean packed a suitcase, then

kissed her daughter good-bye. Twig didn't even get as far as the sidewalk. At the bottom of the front steps, she turned back.

"I don't have any money," she told her mother.

"Well," Jean said gently, "why don't you stay home for now and earn some money?"

But Jean's mind was suddenly spinning. She remembered Buck Queen, how he had walked out of his house and escaped to his cabin. There were overwhelming moments when she, too, felt like walking out the front door and running away.

Of course, she couldn't. She was a mother and would never leave her children. But her boy could run away, her boy in the novel. That was the answer! That's how he could escape to the woods.

Jean began to write that very day. She chose the name Sam, after her favorite male cousin. Her character would need plenty of imagination to survive, and her cousin had more than anyone she knew. She made up his last name, Gribley. She didn't know anyone with this name and didn't see it listed in the phone book, but thought it sounded American.

She wanted Sam to live in a tree similar to a hollow sycamore her brothers used to camp inside on an island near the Shack. But Sam's tree would be a hemlock. Jean loved these majestic trees and remembered a huge one in a forest near Penn State.

The next decision was where Sam's tree would be. Jean pulled out a map of New York. She didn't want him on state park land, because he would be picking plants,

snaring small animals, and doing other things that would be illegal on park land. She spotted a small town named Delhi. It was in the Catskill Mountains and seemed like a plausible location. She didn't have a chance to visit, but felt sure it must have a library and a general store like those that Sam would visit.

Two weeks later the first draft was done. She put the manuscript away for a while, then later began writing the whole thing over. This time she knew she understood both her character and the story more completely. The result was a simpler, much-improved novel.

After submitting Sam's story to Dutton, she got a call from her editor. "We can't take your book, Jean," she said. "The publisher doesn't think parents should encourage kids to leave home."

Jean was devastated. She wasn't telling kids to leave home. She certainly didn't want her children to run away. But she knew from experience that most kids dream about it at one time or another. Some, like her mother, herself, and Twig, actually try out the idea. But this was a novel, not real life, and she needed an excuse for her character to have his adventure in the woods.

Before long her editor called back with good news. The publisher had changed his mind.

"What happened?" Jean asked.

"I just told him it was better for kids to run to the woods than to the city," she said. "He couldn't argue with that. He loves the mountains, too."

My Side of the Mountain was published in 1959. It won many awards, including a Newbery Honor Award. Jean

was tremendously proud. Her editor told her she thought it should have won the medal. Jean decided that if she'd come this close, she had good reason to hope another one of her books might win this literary crown. She loved having a goal and was spurred on by the challenge.

Chapter 13

On Her Own

Life, my friend Bando once said, is meeting problems and solving them whether you are an amoeba or a space traveller. . . .

I climb on. I must stop thinking about the impossible and solve the problem of what to do now. I must find a new way to provide for us.

On the Far Side of the Mountain

When John's teaching contract ended at Vassar, he found a job as curator of mammals at the Bronx Zoo in New York City. It was 1957, and the Georges moved to Chappaqua, New York, a pretty little town about an hour north of the city.

They bought a brown-shingled house on the side of a wooded hill. Jean took over the rear sun porch as her study so she could write, draw, and keep an eye on the children while they played in the back yard. The surrounding woods were perfect for exploring and camping; there was even a waterfall nearby. During one of many explorations, John and Craig rescued a crow that had been blown from his nest in a windstorm. They named him New York and he learned to say a few words, like "hello," and "hi ya, babe."

Although their new home seemed perfect, there were problems, both financial and personal. John was unsuited for the zoo job and was eventually let go.

Jean and John briefly became a writing team once more, this time writing several articles for *Reader's Digest*, whose offices were just minutes away from the house. They called the articles "Nature Detective," and discussed interesting nature facts they'd learned through books, classes, and firsthand observation.

Eventually John got a job in Washington, D.C., working for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. However, Jean didn't want to move again. Most book publishers were in New York, and *Reader's Digest* was right there in Chappaqua. Once before, she had left New York to go to Michigan. She wouldn't leave again. So John worked in Washington during the week and commuted home on weekends.

Miles weren't the only thing separating Jean and John. They argued all the time. A love of nature had helped bring them together, but on almost every other

issue—raising children, finances, politics—they disagreed. Now that they were spending more time apart, they had even less in common. Jean was unhappy.

After years of soul-searching, Jean made one of the most difficult decisions of her life. In 1968, just days before their twentieth wedding anniversary, Jean and John George divorced. John later returned to the job he loved most, teaching, this time at Penn State.

Although Jean felt sure she had made the right decision, she was terrified. Now she needed to earn a full-time salary. Most children's writers don't earn very much. Before the divorce, the money from her books had been used for extras, like family vacations or special things they wanted.

Luckily, she could earn some money by writing for *Reader's Digest*. As soon as school was out, she and the children headed to the wilderness, this time to the Grand Teton Mountains of Wyoming, where her brothers were living with their families and studying grizzly bears. Jean was going to write an article about her brother's research, and the *Digest* would help pay for the trip. After the war, when Frank and John realized that grizzly bears were endangered, they decided to learn all they could and try to save them. They finished their doctorate degrees and had set up a lab at Yellowstone; here they were using radio transmitters to track the bears and study their habits.

Jean and her family rented a one-room cabin for the summer. It was one of several built by its owner, a man named Jimmy Manges, who greeted them by saying,

"Come on in and try to make a living off the place." Jean smiled, remembering how her father used to say the very same thing back at the Shack. She was beginning to feel at home.

However, Twig, Craig, and Luke—now 13, 11, and 7—were not so sure they liked it there, especially when Mr. Manges handed the boys an ax and said, "Here's your heat, hot water, and cooking fuel," and then handed Twig a bucket, saying "The spring's at the bottom of the hill." That night Twig got nervous when the coyotes began to wail. By the next morning, though, all three children had adjusted to life in the mountains, catching trout in the stream and eagerly helping with the chores.

Frank, John, their wives and children were energetic hosts. The Georges even got a firsthand look at a grizzly. The twins caught him in a trap and put him briefly to sleep so they could do their research without being injured. They tagged, weighed, and measured the bear and took impressions of his teeth and paws. Even though the animal was unconscious, it was difficult work.

Just before the bear's anesthesia wore off, Jean's brothers took some pictures that made it appear as if Craig were holding up the grizzly. As the last photograph was snapped, the bear blinked.

"Get in the cars," Frank ordered.

Everyone ran. Twig was so scared she jumped in the car and crouched on the floor. The bear stretched and, still dazed, headed for the woods.

Back home, Jean wrote the article, which became one of the most popular *Reader's Digest* had ever published.

Later, *National Geographic* filmed a television special about the Craighead brothers' exciting research.

Now that the family finances depended on Jean, she had to be away more often for meetings and interviews. She decided to hire a babysitter two days a week, a woman named Mrs. Davidson who had already raised 11 children of her own. Jean thought she was just the type of sweet, grandmotherly woman she was looking for.

That is, until Twig, Luke, and Craig started repeating her stories. Mrs. Davidson had grown up on a farm, and spun tales about babies born with pigs' heads. She convinced the George children to brush their teeth by removing her false ones and chomping her gums. She watched wrestling on television, yelling and jumping up and down like a wrestler herself.

Jean decided a college girl would be a better role model, so she hired one. But things didn't go well.

Twig, Craig, and Luke loved Mrs. Davidson. They wanted her back, and they came up with a plan. They put dog biscuits on their plates, gobbled them up like dogs, and told the college girl that their mother never fed them anything else. Craig even barked for good measure.

The new sitter refused to return, and, much to the children's delight, back came Mrs. Davidson.

At times, Craig and Luke *did* eat dog food. Once or twice a year they disappeared into the woods for a weekend, to "make a living off the land," as Jean and her brothers had done when they were young. After a few years they decided squirrels took too long to cook, so they borrowed their dog's biscuits and swiped vegetables

and fruit from a neighbor's garden on the edge of the forest.

"You boys better watch out," Jean said with a stern look.

"It's okay," Luke replied. "The gardener thinks we're raccoons."

Jean had known there would be tough times ahead, and indeed there were. Occasionally *Reader's Digest* rejected her articles. When money was low, she and the kids ate canned soup and chili; when Jean sold an article or a book, they bought steak or lobster. At one point, Jean confessed to Twig that she was thinking about giving up writing, selling the house, and taking a job with regular hours and pay.

"Don't," Twig said. "We're used to feast and famine."

As Jean continued to write children's books, one of her editors, a woman named Elizabeth Riley, gave her some advice, much as Theodore Roethke had done years before.

"Stop illustrating your books," she told Jean. "Your drawings are nice, but your books deserve the work of full-time artists."

Jean was sad, but knew she wasn't as good as these other artists. Besides, illustrating took lots of time, and, with children to raise and support, she didn't have any to spare. She'd rather be writing.

Riley also suggested that Jean stop writing fiction. She said Jean didn't write effective dialogue, that she should

switch to writing nonfiction books instead. This time Jean disagreed.

"I can learn," Jean said. "Teach me. Stories are the best way for children to learn science. Besides, I love telling stories."

Riley and Jean worked together for many years, on both fiction and nonfiction books. Jean usually wrote at least one book a year. Some were novels, some were picture books, some were fiction, some were nonfiction. One thing tied these books together: animals were always a major part of the story.

After *My Side of the Mountain*, she wrote *The Summer of the Falcon*, a novel based on her childhood summers at Craigheads. The heroine is a girl named June whose older twin brothers give her a sparrow hawk to train. The book is filled with real-life details: Bear Cave, the clay city Jean and her cousin, Sam, built; their secret language; and the huge Victorian house.

She wrote a 13-volume series called *The Thirteen Moon Books*, a calendar of seasons in which each month is highlighted by an animal's behavior. For instance, in *The Moon of the Wild Pigs*, a peccary piglet explores an Arizona desert in July; in *The Moon of the Winter Bird*, a song sparrow who does not migrate survives through a December in Ohio.

She wrote the first of several ecological mysteries, called *Who Really Killed Cock Robin?* In this mystery, the corpse belongs to a robin, and an eighth-grader decides to investigate the death.

Jean was obviously talented, and few writers knew so

much about nature. When Riley retired, she told Jean to keep writing fiction—she believed Jean could write a Newbery Medal-winner.

Jean wasn't so sure.

In 1968 Jean got a letter from her alma mater saying that Penn State had nominated her as Woman of the Year, in recognition of her personal and professional achievements. What a boost it was to go back to the very place she'd started, this time as a guest of honor.

She traveled to Pennsylvania to accept the award. One of her former professors, C. R. Carpenter, met her at the airport. They caught up on their lives and work; Jean told him she had been hired as a staff writer for *Reader's Digest*, a position that guaranteed her more work and pay.

As proud as she was of her achievements, Jean confessed one regret. "I still haven't won a Newbery," she told him. "I'm afraid I'll never get it."

Later, Carpenter spoke of his continuing research on animal behavior. One of his latest interests was a group of Japanese monkeys with an interesting social structure. Among various groups of animals, including these monkeys, certain individuals become leaders. Scientists call these leaders "alphas." He hoped Jean might write an article about them.

"Aren't there any alphas closer than Japan?" Jean asked.

"Wolves," Carpenter said. "Study the wolves."

Chapter 14

The Wolves

She had been lost without food for many sleeps on the North Slope of Alaska. The barren slope stretches for three hundred miles from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean, and for more than eight hundred miles from the Chukchi to the Beaufort Sea. No roads cross it; ponds and lakes freckle its immensity. Winds scream across it, and the view in every direction is exactly the same. Somewhere in this cosmos was [Julie]; and the very life in her body, its spark and warmth, depended upon these wolves for survival. And she was not so sure they would help.

Julie of the Wolves

From the moment she set foot in Barrow, Alaska, Jean felt as though she were in another world. She had taken

Professor Carpenter's suggestion seriously about studying wolves—she had traveled to the Arctic Circle to write an article about them for *Reader's Digest*. It was the summer of 1970 and she had brought along 13-year-old Luke. Twig and Craig were busy with summer jobs.

Fog had kept Jean and Luke in Fairbanks for two days, but finally it lifted enough for their plane to land. There were no trees on this northern edge of the state, just the Arctic Ocean, ice, oil barrels, abandoned machinery, and a few buildings and houses.

One of the first things they saw was a small native girl walking in the distance, into nothingness. She was an Inupiat Eskimo—an Eskimo who spoke a dialect called Inupiaq. She looked young to be alone, but she looked determined. *Where is she going?* Jean wondered. *What is her life like?*

Everywhere they looked, things were different. The Top-of-the-World Hotel sounded as though it might be posh, but, with no flush toilets or running water, it was hardly elegant. The hotel clerk pointed to a cooler and explained that here in Barrow, water came from melting iceberg chips.

After a lunch of reindeer soup, the Georges decided to explore. Along the beach they spotted a sealskin boat beside a huge bowhead whale. The Inupiat Eskimos had made a kill and were carving the meat, using everything possible for one purpose or another. Jean and Luke watched for quite some time. After several hours, the whalers towed the remaining skeleton back to the water, a gift to the sea, in hopes that more whales would come their way.

That evening Jean and Luke ate whale meat. It was tender and delicious, tasting of the ocean. Then came the time Luke had been waiting for—night. He was excited because in Barrow, Alaska, it never gets dark in the summer. (Similarly, because of the way the earth spins around the sun, in winter, it is *always* dark there.) At midnight Jean and Luke returned to the beach to see the midnight sun. The sun looked ready to set, but it didn't. Instead of disappearing, it began to rise once more. In the distance a wolf howled.

That's a good omen, Jean thought.

It was hard to sleep in the perpetual daylight, but they managed by pretending to take a nap. The next day they visited the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory to talk to several wolf experts.

One scientist had stayed up all night watching two wolves interact and monitoring their heart rates. Another, Dr. Michael Fox, led them to a wild wolf inside a cage. The male was gray, glistening and beautiful.

As Jean and Luke watched, the wolf approached Luke and sniffed through his cage. Then he walked to the opposite end of the cage, but turned, opening his mouth and showing his teeth.

"He likes you, Luke," Dr. Fox said. "He's smiling."

Dr. Fox explained that the wolf was friendly to Luke because he could tell he was a child, and, therefore, not a threat. Had Luke been a man, the wolf would have been

afraid. The wolf wasn't afraid of Dr. Fox, however, because they were used to each other.

He explained about the many ways wolves communicate with one another: by voice, scent, eye contact, and body markings and movement. Wolves have their own language; they send messages by using a variety of whines, growls, barks, and howls. They're much like dogs in the way they use scent—when one wolf sniffs another, he can tell a lot about that wolf. Like dogs, wolves mark their territory by urinating. As for eye contact, wolves, like humans, send signals to each other this way, by looking each other in the eye.

Finally, Dr. Fox discussed the body language of wolves. Leaders hold their heads and tails high, while weak wolves hold their heads and tails low. Whenever a wolf shows his white belly, he is communicating, "I surrender." An alpha wolf shows he's a leader by putting his mouth over the muzzles of other wolves. In return, the subordinate wolves then lick the alpha; some get down on their bellies or roll over.

Dr. Fox opened the door of the cage and stepped inside. He began to whine, then put his mouth on the wolf's nose. In wolf language, Dr. Fox was telling this wolf that *he* was the boss. Jean caught her breath, wondering whether the wolf would bite. But he licked the scientist, who then scratched his ears.

Jean couldn't believe it. Here was the supposedly wild wolf, feared by so many—yet he seemed as gentle as a cocker spaniel. At that moment she decided she had to learn their language.

Next Dr. Fox showed them a cage containing a mother and four pups, whom he was studying to learn about the personalities of alphas. He put a tin can inside, something the young wolves had never seen. Each one stared at the shiny new object, but only one came close and sniffed.

He was the alpha pup. Dr. Fox found that alphas are fearless, take initiative, and possess great tenacity.

After touring the rest of the lab, Jean returned to the mother wolf, whom she called Silver because of her light gray coat. Silver lay in one corner of the cage, surrounded by sleeping pups.

Jean whined, trying to imitate Dr. Fox. Silver didn't seem to notice. Jean tried again; this time Silver moved one eyebrow. Jean tried different noises, sounds she thought to be wolflike, but Silver drifted off to sleep.

The next day, Luke got to play with the pups, holding and cuddling them like pets. One of the scientists asked if Luke wanted to take one home; he assured them the wolf would make a good pet.

He added: "If there was ever any doubt in my mind that a man could live with the wolves, it is gone now. The wolves are truly gentlemen, highly social and affectionate."

Jean didn't doubt his words, but knew it wouldn't be safe to take a puppy home. The problem was people—too many were afraid of wolves, and a pet wolf was likely to be shot.

On this and subsequent visits, Jean continued to try to talk to Silver. She had little luck, until suddenly, during one visit, Silver curled her lips in a smile, looked Jean in the eye, and wagged her tail.

She had done it! Jean had talked to a wolf!

Silver continued to “talk,” moving and making noises. Jean had no idea what the wolf was saying.

But when Silver tugged the sleeve of her coat, Jean thought she understood.

“You want me to come live with you?” she said. “I wish I could. But I can’t.”

With a little growl, Silver turned away.

Jean decided she wanted a parka from Alaska as a souvenir. That’s how she and Luke met Julia Sevegan, a seamstress who also worked as a nurse’s aide at the hospital in Barrow. Jean went to her home to be measured; Julia would make the parka and mail it to Jean in New York.

The Sevegans lived in a small house on the edge of the Arctic Ocean. Julia’s workroom, which was also her bedroom and living room, was filled with a sewing machine, brightly colored scraps of fabric, and the furs of polar bears, caribou, and seals. Guns, paddles, and harpoons hung on one wall—Julia’s husband was a hunter.

Julia was a short woman with a round face, dark eyes, and black hair. Mr. Sevegan told Jean that she was a shaman, a person with magical healing powers.

When Jean asked about this, Julia responded, "It's because I once saw a ten-legged bear."

"That can't be," Jean said. "It must have been a mother with her cubs standing behind her."

"No," Julia said firmly, looking stern.

Jean immediately wished she hadn't doubted her new acquaintance. The awkwardness ended, however, when Luke said, "That's amazing!"

Julia smiled, then said she would show them a picture of the bear, which her son had drawn. She removed something from the wall that Jean recognized as baleen, the part of a whale's upper jawbone that serves as teeth. Scratched on the surface were a ten-legged polar bear, icebergs, and hunters.

"It *does* have ten legs," Jean said, trying to make amends.

Julia smiled and said, "Take it. It's an animal spirit."

Jean was surprised, and at first felt she shouldn't take such a special gift from someone she had just met. However, she understood that the people of Julia's culture had ideas different from her own, and that this was Julia's way of welcoming her and Luke.

"I'm honored," she said.

Julia measured Jean for the parka and decided on its design. It would take several months to make the handsome, red velvet coat trimmed with the fur of an Arctic fox.

At one point Julia looked at Luke and said, "If you lived according to our ancient traditions, you'd be married by now."

Luke's eyes widened. "Why?" he asked.

"Your parents would make arrangements with the parents of a girl, and you would go live in their igloo. You would hunt and work with the men. On the day that you killed your first caribou or seal, you would be considered a man, no longer a boy. But you would still stay with your wife's family. Later, the two of you would move back to your family's igloo. You wouldn't build your own igloo until you and your wife had learned to work well together as a team—you had become a good hunter and she had learned to make clothes and food. By then you would probably have children."

Luke frowned. He was glad *not* to be an Eskimo.

Before Jean and Luke left, Mr. Sevegan showed them the family freezer—a large, deep pit beside the house. A door protected the entrance; a ladder led to the bottom. This freezer required no electricity—permafrost kept all the meat frozen: caribou, reindeer, seal, duck, and whale.

Walking back to the hotel, Jean told Luke, "Eskimos have to be incredibly smart to survive here."

Jean kept thinking about Julia and her husband. Both of them, she realized, were alphas, leaders. In this harsh environment, they couldn't survive without each other. Mr. Sevegan provided the food, while Julia cooked and made the clothes. Jean was full of admiration for both of them.

Early the next morning, Jean and Luke decided to explore the tundra. The landscape was strange, full of

grass, moss, marshes, and lakes where the snow had melted. The view looked the same for miles in every direction.

Jean and Luke startled a huge flock of red-backed sandpipers; several thousand flapped into the air. They also saw Arctic terns, wondrous gull-like birds that migrate from the top of the world to the bottom and back again, between the Arctic and Antarctica, each year. They also saw a pair of snowy owls, one with a lemming in its beak. Luke had held one of these small Arctic rodents at the naval laboratory.

After about an hour, Jean and Luke turned around. It was time to go back. But a few minutes later, Luke said, "Mom, Barrow is behind us."

Jean stopped. "That can't be right," she said. "It must be a mirage."

She was sure they were going in the right direction, that Barrow was straight ahead. She looked at the sun and the shadows. With the sun directly overhead, however, she could no longer rely on it as a compass. She knew how to navigate in the woods; she never got lost. But here in the Arctic, everything was different.

She climbed to the top of a frost heave for a better view. Luke *was* right. Barrow was *behind* them, exactly opposite of where she thought it was. Suddenly Jean understood the stories she'd heard of hunters who become lost, walking in circles for days.

Changing direction, they walked toward the towers and rooftops of Barrow, trying to keep them in sight every step of the way. Jean was relieved to make it back safely.

Jean had heard about a man named Gordon Haber, a graduate student at McKinley National Park (now known as Denali National Park) who was studying wolf packs in the wild. The wolves here in the Barrow lab were fascinating, but they were caged, slightly “socialized” to the ways of humans. Jean wanted to see wolves running wild, completely free.

Before leaving Barrow, she and Luke paid a farewell visit to the lab. While Luke inspected a caged polar bear, Jean walked over to Silver’s pen. She whimpered, but Silver deliberately ignored her. Wolf language can be very different from human ways of communicating. In wolf language, Silver’s refusal to take notice meant she knew Jean was there and that she mattered.

Only when another wolf howled, did Silver respond more directly, sitting up and howling. One by one, all the wolves in the lab began to sing their eerie song.

Once in the shadows of the mighty Mount McKinley, Jean and Luke spent hours listening to Haber, who had been studying wild wolf packs for nearly five years. He camped outside near their dens from April through November, following their movements and learning their ways.

For more than a week, Jean and Luke camped on the banks of the Sanctuary River. They didn’t have a tent, so they spread their sleeping bags underneath a spruce.

Haber took them to an observation site he had established above a wolf den. Jean and Luke peered at the

wolves through a telescope. The scientist didn't want them to get any closer; he feared they might scare the wolves away.

As Jean caught a glimpse of the black alpha, Haber explained that this male made all the decisions. Alphas grew bigger than the other wolves for reasons no one understood. Jean couldn't help giving this animal a name—Amaroq—the Inupiat word for wolf. Jean watched him eat, play, sleep, and keep order among the group.

One evening Amaroq raised his head, closed his eyes, and began to howl—the hunt song. The alpha female joined in, then the rest, in order of status. Amaroq and two other adults set off single file, leaving the young in the care of a “babysitter” wolf. The pups immediately began to romp; one of their favorite games was “jump-on-the-babysitter.”

Very early one morning, Haber awakened Jean and Luke, inviting them to accompany him to the pack's previous den, known as the “nursery den,” where the pups had been born. He held a large rifle.

“What's that for?” Jean asked.

“Grizzlies.”

Jean was worried. With so few trees, there was no place to hide on the tundra, and a ranger had spotted several bears near the nursery, three miles away. But she wanted to see the den.

Once there, Jean relaxed. The den, which was located on a ridge above the river, had a spectacular view—and was the perfect place to watch for bears. They could see for

miles: canyons, rocks, snow-topped mountains, and clouds. Sometimes, when the clouds lifted, they caught a glimpse of Mount McKinley. Wildflowers grew all around. Jean wished she had her paints.

The wolves had left signs of their presence. There were holes where the pups had learned to dig. The adults had molded the ground into "sleeping cups." The den itself consisted of a tunnel and chamber.

Just as they were leaving, Jean gazed into the distance, overcome by the beauty. That's when she saw it—a huge bear. It wasn't too close, but it was heading toward the trail they would be using. Jean knew that although bears look clumsy, they can run fast—as swiftly as 40 miles per hour.

"Grizzly!" she shouted. She crouched down, ready to hide.

"Come on!" Haber shouted. "We've got to run. We have to get ahead of him."

They had a lightning-quick discussion. Jean and Luke's first instinct was to stay put until the bear was gone. Haber said that if they didn't get ahead of him, they would have to walk behind him on the same trail. The bear might turn around and catch their scent. Jean and Luke decided to follow Haber's advice.

Haber and Luke started running. Jean followed, but her feet felt like lead. The tundra was tough terrain, spongy and uneven, and Jean felt like she was moving slowly. But after she passed a flying jay, she knew she was making good time.

When Jean caught up with him, Haber stopped and

looked back. The bear had turned around. They were out of danger.

As they gasped for breath, a wolf began to howl. The sound came from the den they had just fled. A female and her pups were standing on the ridge, watching them suspiciously. Jean shivered. Here, on the turf of wolves and grizzlies, humans were uninvited visitors.

That night, as they thought about their encounter with the bear, Jean and Luke took longer than usual to fall asleep. Jean heard the wolves howling, then drifted off thinking how each member of the pack had an important role to play, how each one depended on the others for survival—just as Julia and her husband depended on each other.

Their trip would soon be over. She couldn't wait to write her article.

Chapter 15

Defeat, Then Triumph

She knew what it was—she should not depend on the wolves for survival. She must go on her own. Instantly she felt relieved, her legs moved, her hands stopped shaking. . . .

Julie of the Wolves

Soon after arriving home, Jean went to the *Reader's Digest* offices to tell her editor about her trip.

After listening carefully, the editor said, "The wolves will make a wonderful story. Go home and write about them."

About a week later he called Jean at home. "Stop writing, Jean," he said.

"What?"

"I'm sorry, but while you were in Alaska, another editor bought a wolf article by someone else. I didn't know about it. It's a horrible mistake, but there's nothing I can do. We can't use your article."

They continued to talk. The editor was angry—and sad—about the mix-up. Nonetheless, when he told Jean who the other writer was, even she had to agree that this scientist was one of the most respected wolf researchers around.

Jean hung up. She felt like crying. Weeks of research, weeks of amazing stories—all for nothing. Those generous, knowledgeable scientists—Dr. Fox, Gordon Haber, and the others—she'd be letting them down. And there were bills to pay—the house, food, clothes, and college tuition for Craig and Twig.

Later, when the very worst moments had passed, Jean called the editor back to suggest that she write an article about snowy owls. The story wouldn't be as exciting, but at least she could use some of her research and pay a few bills. The editor agreed.

Jean was still upset, so she called Twig, who was at Bennington College in Vermont. "I wish I could write about the wolves," Jean told her daughter. "That's all I want to do."

"Why don't you, then?" Twig said. "Write a children's book about them."

For a moment Jean mulled over the idea.

"Hm," she said slowly. "I think it might work."

All of a sudden Jean felt excited again. She spent the rest of the day thinking about how she could turn all she

had learned about wolves into a children's book. She thought about alpha wolves, about the way wolves communicate, about losing her sense of direction on the tundra. She thought about Silver and Amaroq. By the next day, she had a basic plan.

"I want to write a book," Jean told editor Ursula Nordstrom at Harper & Row, "about a girl who gets lost on the tundra. She survives by learning to talk to wolves."

The editor asked whether the book would be accurate; Jean assured her that it would be. For the second time in only a few days, an editor told her to go home and write about the wolves.

This time there was no stopping Jean. Even so, the work was difficult. The biggest problem was deciding who the little girl was. At first Jean thought she would be a girl from the United States mainland who visits Alaska and gets lost.

Then Jean realized that anyone who wasn't used to the tundra would probably die. Even Sam Gribbley, resourceful as he was, wouldn't know how to survive in the Arctic. *Who would?* she thought.

Jean remembered the little girl she and Luke had seen when they first stepped off the plane in Barrow. She was walking alone on the tundra. Small as she was, the girl had looked right at home. Jean also remembered Julia Sevegan—her strength, her resourcefulness, and the stories she had told about her people and their traditions.

Slowly Jean's heroine began to take shape, a blend of the tundra girl and Julia. But she would be called Julie,

not Julia. Jean thought the name "Julie" sounded more like a child's name, and that it flowed more easily in the text.

She began at the heart of her story: Julie is lost and realizes that the wolves are her only chance for survival. If she befriends them, she can share their food and learn the ways of this harsh land. Jean used every detail she'd learned about wolf behavior, especially their interaction with people. She often pictured Dr. Fox putting his mouth on the wolf's nose, telling the wolf that he was boss. She thought of her "talks" with Silver. She remembered Amaroq howling his tundra hunt song. Before long, she saw Julie watching Silver and Amaroq. She began to write.

Now Jean began to wonder where Julie had come from, how she came to be lost. She read several books about the Yupik Eskimos, who live in a place called Nunivak Island, Alaska, and speak a language called Yupik. Life is tough in this land of winter winds and snow, and fog in summer. The island people understand the unforgiving ways of the Arctic. Julie would grow up on Nunivak, Jean decided.

As Jean wrote, her character grew stronger and stronger. Julie wasn't a quitter. Instead of giving up, she looked around and saw possibilities. Even when everything seemed impossible, she kept trying.

At the end of seven months, Jean had written a first draft. She spent several more months revising. At last she was satisfied. Her new book was a love letter, a tribute to the people of Barrow, to the scientists who

had taught her so much about wolves and animal behavior, and, finally, to the beautiful tundra.

Julie of the Wolves was published in 1972.

When Jean first held a copy in her hands, she thought: *I'm on my own now. Truly on my own. All the other books I've written were souvenirs from my childhood—falcons, owls, foxes, and raccoons—the creatures Frank, John, and I grew up with, the animals Dad taught us about. But these wolves are totally new territory. I'm blazing my own trail now—just like Julie.*

All over the country, *Julie of the Wolves* was getting good reviews. But not from everyone. The children's book editor of *The New York Times* thought Julie's behavior was foolish. He couldn't believe a human being would walk around like that, on hands and knees.

He called Jean and said: "Don't you think it's a little much?"

Where, he wanted to know, were Jean's artistic sensibilities?

"But every word is true," Jean replied. "I saw for myself in Alaska. The scientists showed me."

Jean was disappointed. Even though she'd worked so hard, she must not have been convincing.

Writing is such a tough business, she thought for the millionth time.

One January evening, Jean got a phone call informing her that *Julie of the Wolves* had won a Newbery Medal.

She took the news calmly, she thought. Later she discovered that after receiving the call, she had put the book she was reading in the refrigerator, had offered her neighbor dog food instead of cookies, and had washed clothes that were already clean.

She woke up in the middle of the night. She was so excited she couldn't get back to sleep, so she went downstairs and lit a fire. A bat swooped through the room. Luke had found him earlier that day and brought him home. Jean watched the bat fly through her house for the rest of the night.

A few months later, Jean traveled to Las Vegas to accept the award. There were book-signings and parties. Then, the big moment arrived. In the audience were several thousand librarians who had gathered to hear her speech.

Jean shook as she approached the microphone. She gathered her composure, however, when she looked at the table where she'd been sitting and saw the proud faces of Twig, several other family members, and a group of her editors. For one brief instant she thought of the tundra, the wolves, and, of course, Julia Sevegan.

She told the audience about her and Luke's Alaskan adventures and about why the wolves were so fascinating. She ended by thanking many people for their help: scientists, editors, her parents, her children, the rest of her family, and the librarians. Then she directed her final

thanks “across the vanishing wilderness, across the wild rivers and tundras, over the delicate wildflowers and grasses, past the nose of the ten-legged bear, right into the midst of the vanishing species. I throw this bouquet to the loving wolves.”

After the bright lights and hustle of Las Vegas, Jean headed directly for the Grand Canyon. She was going backpacking. Accompanying her was Twig, Twig’s boyfriend, and her sister-in-law, Margaret, John’s wife.

Jean had visited the Grand Canyon once before, with her father, but she had never hiked to the bottom. Now she and her companions hiked and camped, starting from the South Rim and setting up camp at Indian Springs, a beautiful spot surrounded by a cool grove of cottonwoods and wildflowers. The day was unbearably hot, and their skin, clothes, and hiking boots were covered with the canyon’s brown-orange dust. They splashed themselves with the spring’s invigorating, ice-cold water.

Then they hiked to the floor of the canyon. Jean dipped her feet into the even colder waters of the Colorado River and gazed up at the canyon walls.

Before us, Jean thought, is one of the most magnificent masterpieces ever, a tapestry representing three billion years of earth history, all sculpted by wind and water. The world is certainly full of extremes, from the plants and animals that have adapted to this hot, sunny world, to those on the Arctic tundra. Everywhere you look, there’s something new.

The day’s wandering light transformed the canyon walls into a landscape of ever-changing colors. Many details and colors were temporarily lost in the brightness

of the heat of the midday sun. In the morning and evening, however, the orange-red palate was bathed with shades of pink, blue, green, and brown.

They hiked back up to their campsite and slept under the bright stars. Jean fell asleep with a smile on her face. She was proud of the medal, she was with people she loved, and she was camping in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

They woke up just before dawn and began hiking back to the rim. With this head start, they could finish their climb before the day heated up once more.

Even so, the trail was exhausting. Margaret, who was the first woman to climb the peaks of the Rockies, led the way. She told the climbers how to pace themselves: one step, count two, relax leg muscles, then step.

Margaret's approach worked. True, sometimes other hikers passed them, rushing by. But eventually Jean and her family passed them by, leaving them at the side of the trail, gasping for air.

Hiking, Jean thought, is a lot like writing. Slow and steady. Keep at it. Keep working. You'll get there.

After the excitement of the Newbery Award ceremony and the Grand Canyon trip, Jean returned home to write. There would be many more books. Even when the writing went well, it was hard work, and she often remembered trudging out of the Grand Canyon. In 1989 Jean published a sequel to *My Side of the Mountain*,

called *On the Far Side of the Mountain*. In the book, Sam tells of his own upward journey:

*Although we're tired, the top of the mountain
we're climbing calls to us, and we scramble on to
its summit. Here we see the Catskill, Helderberg,
and distant Adirondack Mountains. I understand
why people climb mountains. I am an eagle.*

Afterward

Jean Craighead George continues to live and work in her brown-shingled house on a hillside of Chappaqua, New York. Walk in the front door and one of the first things you will see is Julie's face, smiling out from a framed copy of the book's cover art.

To the left of the doorway is a small stone pool that's been there for years, home to various fish and frogs. Nearby, on the stairwell wall, is a mural in which railroad tracks rise up beside rocky mountains. In one corner of the scene stands Rocky Mountain goats, those other-worldly animals Jean climbed the mountains to learn about. They peer gently at all who enter this home.

Mementos are everywhere: seashells, flowers, rocks, pictures painted by Jean's mother, Eskimo masks, the

baleen from a whale, and mukluks—soft Eskimo boots made from reindeer or seal skin. The bookshelves are full, some with copies of Jean's books, including those translated into foreign languages. One wall of the kitchen is a sort of bulletin board, a huge collage of family photos and souvenirs.

Jean shares the house with Qimmiq, an Alaskan malamute; and Tocca Two, an African gray parrot. Tocca loves to talk, saying things like "Apple good," "Cool," or "Where's Qimmiq?" Qimmiq has his own language—a bark, a song, and a howl like a wolf's. Sometimes Jean joins him for a duet.

Year ago Luke counted all the wild animals the family had adopted over the years. Not including dogs and cats, the tally came to 173. No doubt the number will continue to grow. After thinking about all of these pets, Jean's children asked her to write about them. The book is called *The Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Other Wild Pets*.

Luke, Craig, and Twig have left home now—grown, with families of their own. All three chose careers in nature, writing, or both, and all three married people who also work with nature and animals. Luke is a professor in the Department of Wildlife at Humboldt State University in California. In addition to teaching, he researches birds and their habitats, and manages a small refuge for birds. His wife, Carol Ann Moorhead, is a freelance children's writer and artist specializing in environmental education. She wrote *Colorado's Backyard Wildlife* and *Wild Horses*.

Not too many years after Jean and Luke first traveled to Alaska, Craig decided to make the state his home. In the

novel, *Water Sky*, Jean describes a “science camp” where scientists monitor whales; this is where Craig works. He is a wildlife biologist in Barrow, studying whales for the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management. (Jean wrote *Water Sky* after Craig invited her to come see Eskimos whaling, and to see how important whales are to this culture.)

Craig married Cyd Hanns, now an assistant public health officer at Barrow’s veterinary clinic. They have two sons—Luke and Sam. The boys also have Eskimo names—Kupaaq (Luke) and Iyahauq (Sam). Luke, especially, likes his Eskimo name.

Frequently real life merges with fiction in intriguing ways. Craig and Cyd have become friends with Julia Sevegan, the woman who was the inspiration for the character of Julie. Julia still lives with her children in Barrow and continues to make money by sewing. Craig’s family goes to her whenever they need new mukluks or other native clothing.

Craig once gave Julia Sevegan a copy of *Julie of the Wolves*. “I don’t think she has a clue that her name is spread around the world and in every library,” Craig says.

While Craig and Luke are in the western part of the country, Twig lives in the east, near Baltimore, Maryland. There, her husband, David Pittenger, is director of the National Aquarium. They have two daughters, Rebecca and Katie.

For many years, Twig helped develop educational programs combining science and the arts, especially

literature. One day she saw a fox running through the yard and began writing her first story—just as, many years ago, her mother started her career by writing about a fox.

When an editor said it was not quite “there,” she decided to start another story—about a dolphin. She was inspired by dolphins at the National Aquarium, and spent many days observing them. A few times, she even swam in their tanks. Based on these experiences, she wrote her first book, *A Dolphin Named Bob*, which was published in 1996.

Jean loves to visit her children and grandchildren as often as possible. Not only do they have fun, but her grandchildren often inspire her to write new books. For instance, after Rebecca once asked her what winter was, Jean wrote a picture book called *Dear Rebecca, Winter is Here*.

Each morning, Jean wakes up with the birds, typically about 5:30. She usually heads to a town diner for breakfast, then comes home to write. Sometimes Tocca gives her a nudge by saying, “Get to work, Jean.” Jean doesn’t mind the encouragement; she says mornings are her most productive time.

A few years ago, she renovated her study and added more windows. The additional light makes Jean almost feel as though she’s working outdoors. She has a clear view of the woods, flowers, birds, and a small waterfall and pond she recently built in the back yard.

One day in January of 1996, Jean was hard at work on a sequel to *Julie of the Wolves* and *Julie*. Spread out beside

her computer was a hand-drawn map of the tundra, showing the territories of various wolf packs in the new book. As usual, she's giving herself new challenges: this time she's telling the story from the wolves' point of view, not Julie's.

Jean described one way in which her books unfold: "In the morning, I always sit down and close my eyes and become Sam or Julie or whomever it is I happen to be writing about at the time. Then I open my eyes and see what that character sees. With this project, I'm Kapu looking out over wolf land and seeing, hearing, and smelling all tundra life."

This change in point of view means Jean has to think about many new details, such as how wolves communicate with each other.

"I've put in 'wolf names' that are based on scent and sound," Jean explains. "For instance, when Julie first appeared, she smelled of the willows she had just crawled through. So Kapu thinks of her as 'Willow Pup.' When he hears people calling her Julie, she becomes 'Willow Pup Julie.'"

Obviously, words, characters, ideas, stories, and books continue to pour out of Jean Craighead George. After writing more than 65 books, which is her favorite?

Her answer is always the same: "The one I'm working on," she says. For Jean Craighead George, the joy is always in the creating.

Time Line

- 1919 Jean Carolyn Craighead is born in Washington, D.C., on July 2.
- 1920 The Craigheads move to Ottawa, Canada, where Dr. Craighead is studying bark beetles for the Canadian government.
- 1924 The family moves back to Washington, D.C.
- 1937 Jean graduates from Woodrow Wilson High School and enters Pennsylvania State University, where she majors in English and science.
- 1941 Jean graduates from Penn State
- 1942 After Pearl Harbor, Jean leaves graduate school at Louisiana State University to begin a journalism career in Washington, D.C. During the next five years, she reports for the International News Service, *The Washington Post*, the Newspaper Enterprise Association, and *Pageant* magazine.
- 1944 Jean Craighead marries John George on January 28.
- 1948 Jean's first book, *Vulpes the Red Fox*, (co-written with John George) is published.
- 1950 Daughter, Twig, is born.
- 1952 Son, Craig, is born.
- 1956 Son, Luke, is born.

- 1957 The Georges move to Chappaqua, New York.
- 1960 *My Side of the Mountain* wins a Newbery Honor Award.
- 1964 Jean and John divorce.
- 1968 Jean becomes a staff writer for *Reader's Digest*. She is honored as Penn State's Woman of the Year.
- 1973 Jean wins the Newbery Medal for *Julie of the Wolves*.

Books by Jean Craighead George

Vulpes the Red Fox, 1948 (with John George)

Vision the Mink, 1949 (with John George)

Masked Prowler, the Story of a Raccoon, 1950
(with John George)

Meph the Pet Skunk, 1952, (with John George)

Bubo the Great horned Owl, 1954 (with John George)

The Dipper of Copper Creek, 1956 (with John George)

The Hole in the Tree, 1957

Snow Tracks, 1958

My Side of the Mountain, 1959

The Summer of the Falcon, 1962

Red Robin, Fly Up! 1963

Gull Number 737, 1964

Spring Comes to the Ocean, 1965

Hold Zero! 1966

The Thirteen Moon series, 1967–1969

Coyote in Manhattan, 1968

*Beastly Inventions: A Surprising Investigation into Just
How Smart Animals Really Are*, 1970

All upon a Stone, 1971

Who Really Killed Cock Robin? (ecological mystery),
1971

Julie of the Wolves, 1972

All upon a Sidewalk, 1974

*Hook a Fish, Catch a Mountain: An Ecological Spy
Story*, 1975

Going to the Sun, 1976

Wentletrap Trap, 1977

*The American Walk Book: An Illustrated Guide to the
Country's Major Historical and Natural Walking
Trails from New England to the Pacific Coast*, 1978

The Wounded Wolf, 1978

River Rats, 1979

The Cry of the Crow, 1980

Journey Inward (autobiography), 1982

The Grizzly Bear with the Golden Ears, 1982

The Talking Earth, 1983

One Day in the— series (Alpine Tundra, Desert,
Prairie, Tropical Forest, Woods), 1983–1987

How to Talk to Your Animals, 1986

Water Sky, 1987

Shark Beneath the Reef, 1989

On the Far Side of the Mountain (sequel to *My Side of the Mountain*), 1989

One Day in a Tropical Rain Forest, 1990

The Missing 'Gator of Gumbo Limbo (ecological mystery), 1992

The Fire Bug Connection (ecological mystery), 1993

Dear Rebecca, Winter Is Here, 1993

The First Thanksgiving, 1993

Animals Who Have Won Our Hearts, 1994

Julie (sequel to *Julie of the Wolves*), 1994

To Climb a Waterfall, 1994

Acorn Pancakes, Dandelion Salad, and 38 Other Wild Recipes, 1994

There's an Owl in the Shower, 1995

Everglades, 1995

The Case of the Missing Cutthroats (reprint of *Hook a Fish, Catch a Mountain*), 1996

The Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Other Wild Pets, 1996

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About the Author

Alice Cary has worked as a freelance writer and editor for several years, and previously as the managing editor of a weekly newspaper in Massachusetts. Her articles and photographs have appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *Boston Magazine*, *TV Guide*, *USA Today*, and *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. She regularly reviews children's books for *Book Page*. She is also the author of *Katherine Paterson*, another book in The Learning Works *Meet the Author* series.

Alice lives in Groton, Massachusetts, with her husband and their two-year-old son, Will. Alice has been a fan of Jean Craighead George's books for many years. She has always enjoyed the woods and hiking, and would have loved to meet Sam Gibley and visit his tree-home.

**The
Learning Works**



**Meet the Author
Series**

Jean Craighead George

The life of Jean Craighead George has been every bit as exciting as those of the characters in her books. In addition to living in a tent for four years, she has explored the Arctic, trained birds of prey, run from grizzlies, and talked with wolves. Taught from childhood to have a deep respect for animals and the natural world, this Newbery Medal-winner has combined her love of nature and her love of writing to produce more than sixty-five books for children, including *My Side of the Mountain* and *Julie of the Wolves*. The many real-life adventures that inspired her popular books will hold readers of this biography spellbound.



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